

Shifting Grounds: Deep Histories of Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland
By Lucy Mackintosh. Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2021.
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Reviewed by Jonathan West

Shifting Grounds is a history of three places: Pukekawa / Auckland Domain, Maungakiekie / One Tree Hill and the Ōtuataua Stonefields at Ihumātao. Such tight focus is matched by a simple, elegant structure: each place is explored across just two times, mostly of a few decades – ‘narrative moments’ (p.13), as Lucy Mackintosh calls them. Only one of six substantive chapters, on Ihumātao and the Ōtuataua Stonefields, surveys change over centuries, from c1350-1840.

Declaring these ‘deep histories’ risks announcing one’s wisdom, perhaps as when we are told ‘the book offers deep, kaleidoscopic reflections’ (p.1) The image is much more productively deployed, in at least three ways. First, as to method: Mackintosh approaches landscape as archive, ‘delving deeply into particular places’ (p.8). Second, as to subject: she uses a long lens, claiming a ‘time frame that spans the length of human history in Tāmaki’; she stresses particularly the importance of early histories, or ‘deep time’, to understanding Auckland today (p.13). She places the episodes she explores in each landscape within a broader historical context and, tracing them to the present, she concludes that following these ‘long temporal arcs’ opens up ‘deep natural and human histories’ (p.221). Finally, as to effect: uncovering histories buried by Auckland’s ‘relentless development’ (p.4) deepens our self-understanding, and so encourages, perhaps, the city to grow in ways that better accommodate its varied histories.

Using texts, written and visual, alongside oral histories, and ‘ephemeral acts’ like meeting and walking, *Shifting Grounds* explores what material things – ‘rocks, memorials, artefacts, structures, archaeological sites’ (p.13) can say about people’s histories of themselves and their places. There are obvious and acknowledged debts here to geographers such as Doreen Massey, also to environmental historians such as William Cronon and Richard White. But integrating such interdisciplinary methods is a bravura high-wire act of writing. Mackintosh’s success in doing so reflects another sense in which this is deep history: the book is a product of twenty years academic and professional work, draws on a range of experience working as a public historian with kaumatua and archaeologists, and is a deserved winner of the Ian Ward’s prize for imaginative and exemplary use of Aotearoa’s archives.

Shifting Grounds shows how people have made the three volcanic cones of Maungakiekie, Pukekawa and Ōtuataua very different places. Maungakiekie, later called One Tree Hill, and Pukekawa, the Auckland Domain, are both central to how Auckland sees itself. They are iconic cones, home to imposing civic monuments: Tāmaki Paenga Hira / Auckland War Memorial Museum, where Mackintosh works as Curator, so prominent on the crater rim above the Domain; and John Logan Campbell’s obelisk on the summit of Maungakiekie, meant to commemorate Māori, erected beside the Monterey pine that Campbell had planted to echo the earlier lone totara and then pohutukawa trees that gave the mountain its other name. But Mackintosh’s concern is to unearth other, lesser-known histories, of Te Wherowhero’s cottage and Ah Chee’s market gardens on the Domain, of Campbell’s olive grove and the Māori cave burial sites under Maungakiekie.

Ōtuataua itself is rescued from obscurity: it first became Quarry Hill, before being obliterated, carried away to form Auckland’s airport, wharves, and local roads. Ōtuataua is part of the

Ihumātao peninsula that juts into the Manukau Harbour by Mangere, a place also treated as marginal to Auckland's history and present politics, till the contests of 2019. The opening chapter of *Shifting Grounds* shows how over centuries Māori transformed this lava landscape, gathering its stones into walls and other structures to create warm and well-drained fertile soils. The Ōtuataua Stonefields are the remnants of a horticultural system that once swathed Auckland's lava fields, amidst traces of undefended settlements, and long-used burial sites and rites, that signal prosperity and peace, during long periods in which Māori moved about Tāmaki as the seasons suited.

Mackintosh points out that the significance of pā in the Auckland landscape, as at Maungakiekie, while much more visible, have been badly overplayed, to buttress myths that Māori were always at war, that Tāmaki was a highway for their armies, that the Te Waiohua peoples were entirely displaced by Ngāti Whatua, that Auckland was abandoned and empty when the town was established in 1840. Rather, she shows: 'Place names, oral histories and archaeology reveal a continuity of occupation in this area by the same broad group of people for hundreds of years up to the present day' (p39).

Auckland's establishment and earliest years are first approached via Governor Robert Fitzroy's construction of a cottage for Te Wherowhero on the Governor's grounds, within sight of Government House, on Pukekawa / Auckland Domain. Mackintosh shows Te Wherowhero living almost side by side with first Fitzroy then Governor Grey, 'operating under different assumptions but with partly convergent interests' (p.73) in balancing tribal dynamics and relations with settlers. Te Wherowhero persuaded Grey to have Te Rauparaha join him under 'house arrest', and hosted large hui to discuss the tribes' relationship to the Crown. As Mackintosh reminds us, Pukekawa means 'hill of bitter memories', named for those who died in the tribal wars of the 1820s and 1830s, after which Te Wherowhero helped bring peace. Fittingly, then, it was Te Wherowhero's great-granddaughter Te Puea who planted a tōtara in the Domain to mark the centenary of the Treaty of Waitangi.

When Mackintosh returns to Ōtuataua she traces the development of the Wesleyan mission station at Ihumātao from 1846 into the 1860s under the patronage of Māori, in particular Te Rangitāhua Ngāmuka of Ngāti Tamaoho, baptized as Ēpiha Pūtuni, who returned to Ihumātao in 1836 with Pōtatau Te Wherowhero as he escorted the Tamaki tribes back to their lands, and later married his daughter. Pūtuni was a devout, principled and intellectual leader; his prosperous Ihumātao community used their fertile lava fields to grow large quantities of fruit, vegetables and grain for the new Auckland markets. But Pūtuni's trust in the settlers to uphold unity under the law was shattered by the improper purchase of his lands.

The Māori settlements around the mission station were sacked after their inhabitants' forced eviction in 1863 – as Mackintosh points out, arguably the opening act of the Waikato War – and the lands confiscated. This history highlights how Māori shaped the development of Auckland well after 1840 – and why the consequences of their brutal eviction could still erupt into national consciousness in 2019, when Māori reoccupied some of the stonefields to protest their development and demand the land back.

Shifting Grounds' themes – of hidden histories, diverse cultural influences, and the lingering traces of largely forgotten pasts – are perhaps best illustrated in the discussion of John Logan Campbell's olive grove on Maungakiekie / One Tree Hill. Campbell first developed the land from the 1850s as a British mixed farm. In the 1870s, on return from extensive European travel, he established an olive grove and vineyard on a plateau below the summit. He planted in a

‘quincunx pattern – like the five on a dice’, likely unaware this replicated how Māori previously grew kumara and taro on the site. Beneath the olive trees, Fong Ming Quong operated a Chinese market garden, initially praised for adding fertility, later blamed for damaging the trees’ roots.

For some decades the grove produced fine olive oil and Mackintosh notes how Campbell drew heavily on the local Italian community for expertise, consulted American Captain James, a large orchard owner experimenting with subtropical fruits, and corresponded with overseas producers and distributors in Australia, California and Portugal. In the end the grove did not succeed, perhaps, Mackintosh suggests, due to lack of expertise with pressing processes. By 1906 the grove was seen as out of place, though lending ‘a charm that is unspeakable – the witchery of strange and foreign things’ (p.143). Some olive trees still remain though, and fine and distinctive oil was pressed from their fruit in 2014. So, as Mackintosh points out, while the British Empire may have dominated the making of New Zealand, the olive grove was a ‘hybrid system’ that far from being simply British, ‘incorporated Māori, North American, Italian and Chinese ideas and practices’ (p.147)

Ah Chee’s large market gardens in Auckland Domain were only rediscovered during the 2007 demolition of Carlaw Park. Families of such Chinese gardeners had stepped in as Māori gardens no longer provided the city with fresh food. But, like Te Wherowhero before them, their presence too was forgotten after the gardens were destroyed to make way for the Auckland Exhibition that opened in 1913. These Chinese families have significantly shaped our histories, Ah Chee’s grandson Thomas opening the Foodtown chain of supermarkets, and the ‘iconic New Zealand pie business, Georgie Pie’ (p.181). A century later, Mackintosh notes, the Auckland Lantern Festival is held in the Domain, so their presence is ‘unwittingly reinvigorated’.

Mackintosh’s final chapter returns to Maungakiekie to explore what we have chosen to remember and commemorate there. To John Logan Campbell’s astonishment, construction of the summit road uncovered a sequence of burial caves. These were closed, perhaps to protect the kōiwi, but were not to be remembered. John Logan Campbell also chose to be buried on the mountain, and his tomb has been incorporated into the monumental obelisk, built in accordance with his will ‘in memoriam to the great Maori race’, which he believed was doomed. Now, Mackintosh notes, the iwi of Tāmaki own their Tūpuna Maunga again, and are redefining these landscapes ‘within their own frameworks and whakapapa’ (p.218).

Shifting Grounds is a highly polished history, a work of beauty from cover to cover; aided by the Bridget Williams Books editing and production team, it has escaped any academic cramping in its origins as a PhD thesis. The book wears its historiography lightly enough, and the holes it identifies – the strangely few and largely old-fashioned histories of Auckland, our lopsided focus on rural over urban landscapes – are real gaps that this book makes a substantive contribution towards plugging. If I had a gripe, it is over the use of images in the book – though these are many, varied and well-chosen, they are not often used as informative sources that shape the text, so much as accompanying illustrations. Their captions therefore carry a lot of weight, and I rather feel their ability to do this is undermined by the decision to detach information about the image sources and provide it at the end of the text.

Lucy Mackintosh has written a splendid book: a pleasure to hold and behold, as much as to read. The gift of *Shifting Grounds* is to change our frames of reference, to see Auckland city differently, and anew: so we may make different and new histories, and shape landscapes perhaps more sympathetic to their past.