

# OTAKOU.

A STORY OF

FAR-OFF DAYS.

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# O T A K O U.

## A Story of Far-off Days.

*Contributed, by Rev. T.A.Pybus.*

Nowhere in the southern parts of this Dominion is there to be found a spot so rich in history; tradition and natural scenery as Otakou. The ever-changing coastline, the hills and valleys which were once covered with luxuriant growth, together with the blue waters of the various bays and inlets, provides scenery which is a delight to all who behold it. Every topographical feature of the district recalls the legends and traditions of 'bygone days.

Originally the name Otakou applied to the whole of the district known as Otago — a corrupted form of the name Otakou. Today the name applies to the Otago Peninsula only.

The Maori people of the district claim that the first inhabitants were the Rapuwai, a big, strong, dark-skinned people. Following them came the Waitaha, later the Ngati-mamoe (Kati Mamoe) of the Hawaiki migration of A.D.1350 and which came in the Takitimu canoe, and finally the Ngaitahu (Kai Tahu) who arrived at Te Wai Pounamu (South Island) about three hundred years ago. It is believed that the Polynesian tribes have been on the Peninsula for approximately nine hundred years, and the present residents consider themselves as Ngaitahu, with a blending of the above mentioned tribes by inter-marriage.

### **FIRST CONTACT WITH EUROPEANS.**

It is probable that Captain James Cook and his crew of the "*Endeavour*" were the first Europeans to view the Coastline of the Peninsula. In 1770 Cook passed by the entrance of the Harbour and Taiaroa Head, and named Cape Saunders after his patron, Admiral Charles Saunders. He must have seen the entrance to the Otago Harbour and Wycliffe Bay, for he writes:-

*"One to four leagues North of the Cape the shore seemed to form two or three bays, wherein there appeared to be anchorage and shelter from S.W., Westerly and N.W. winds".*

After Cook's time, the place may have been visited by stray ships, but the first recorded visit was that of Captain Fowler in the "*Matilda*" in 1813. The place was known as Port Daniel and later as Port Oxley. Captain Fowler was compelled to seek shelter and to refit his vessel. He was well received by the people, and their chief Papui provided the ship with necessary supplies. Fowler speaks of this hospitable chief with the highest regard and veneration:-

*"His stature is full six feet and a half in height, athletically formed, his countenance as benign as his manners are mild, and commanding obedience as a father of a family."*

The next story, that of the visit of Captain Kelly in 1817, bears quite another complexion, for, whereas Captain Fowler was received with the utmost kindness. Captain Kelly and his crew experienced disaster. The Sealer "*Sophia*" anchored just inside the Otakou Harbour, off the main 'Kaika' or settlement, in December 1817, and the Captain entered into friendly relations with the natives. The day following, Kelly with six men proceeded to a Kaika outside the Heads, (now known as Murdering Beach), where he bargained with the Maoris for potatoes. Unexpectedly a struggle took place in which several of the sailors were killed. Kelly and the survivors returned to their vessel in the Otakou Harbour and found it swarming with natives. Immediately a general battle took place. On Boxing Day they landed and burned the native village and escaped from the Harbour. The affray was due to the violation of native customs by the sailors, and, according to Maori custom, "Utu" or revenge was demanded. Much of the trouble between the Maori people and visiting sailors and traders in the early days was due to the unscrupulous conduct of the latter. In many instances they violated Maori customs, desecrated their burial grounds and invaded the sanctity of their home life. It is no wonder that the Maori people demanded "Utu".

## **SHORE WHALING STATIONS**

In the late Twenties and early Thirties, what were known as Shore Whaling Stations were established at various, points along the coast. Of these, the Otakou Station, established by Messrs Weller Bros. in 1832 was the largest and most profitable. At that time, Otakou possessed the largest Maori population South of the Waitaki River. Beside the whalers proper, and natives, there were runaway sailors, foreigners and escaped convicts from Sydney. The conduct of some of these men was so outrageous that the Maoris complained to the Government, and Mr. Martell was commissioned to order them to leave within a certain time. The natives were most unfortunate in their first contacts with so-called civilised men. Every right thinking man must deplore the degrading and corrupting, character of much of the early intercourse between the two races. Many of the men who landed on these shores were notorious evil-doers. Depraved by drunkenness, reckless in life, without honour or decency, they cast themselves among the unsuspecting people who received them with confiding generosity. Such men were not the type to bring knowledge and virtue, or to create among the Maoris a taste for a well regulated life.

At the same time it must be remembered in all fairness that many of the Pakehas (Europeans) were people of high character, who, as soon as the Mission was established, threw themselves heart and soul into the good work. Some of those folk became the founders of the Methodist Church in these parts, and the list includes many honour-able names. Their descendants are in active Christian work today.

## THE DECLINE OF THE MAORI IN OTAKOU.

The Maori population in these parts must at one time have been very large. What are the reasons for the decline that has taken place?

They are mainly associated with factors rising out of their contact with the "Pakeha. As so frequently happens when a new people settle among a primitive race, two great epidemics occurred. To the Maori, influenza and measles were unknown, and he had no powers of resistance. The first epidemic was in 1835. Fever was a new experience to Max, and the Maori, hot with fever, plunged into the sea to cool himself. The results were disastrous. The death rate was terrible and in many cases they died as they stood. Even recently, skeletons have been found far from the Kaikas, lying one across another, testifying to the suddenness of the end. In 1836, the ship "*Sydney Packet*" arrived with a few influenza patients on board. Immediately the disease attacked the Maori, and they died in hundreds, reducing the population to an alarming degree. Venereal diseases also took their sad toll.

These diseases appeared with the whaling crews and came as a new factor in the life of the Maori. The chief Korako, afterwards known as Hoani Weteri Korako, complained bitterly of the diseases brought by the Pakeha.



Hoani Weteri Korako

When the chief Tuawhaiki made his historic and impassioned speech from the hill Ohinetu, overlooking Otakou, to the Pakeha purchasers of Maori lands, he sadly gazed

upon the quickly dwindling people of the tribe. Recognising that the decline was mainly due to the white man's diseases and 'firewater', he said,

*"We were once a numerous people. Our parents, uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters, children, lie around us. We are but a poor remnant.... We are dotted in families, few and far between, where formerly we lived as tribes.... We had a worse enemy than Kauparaha, and that was the visit of the Pakeha with his drink and disease. You think us very corrupted, but the very scum of Port Jackson shipped as whalers or landed as sealers on this coasts. They brought us new plagues, unknown to our fathers, till our people melted away".*

What an indictment!

Still another cause of the decline was the adoption of European clothing. The Maoris would wear heavy garments in hot weather, then suddenly cast them aside and return to their native garb, with disastrous results. Their physique became weakened by pneumonia, bronchitis and many other ailments. Such influences caused rapid deterioration and the alarming decline in the population.

## **THE MISSION**

To establish a Christian Mission under the circumstances prevailing in all the whaling stations of the south was not an easy matter. In order to succeed, tact, ability, devotion and a strong physique were necessary. The first Missionary appointed, Rev. James Watkin, possessed all these qualifications except the last. Weakened in body as a result of strenuous duties in Tonga, he suffered constantly from the depression of neurasthenia. His appointment was due to various circumstances. Mr. John Jones of the Waikouaiti Whaling Station, whose employees were reckless in their conduct, was under the impression that to instil into them some moral principles would be a distinct advantage. He appealed to the Mission Board in Sydney for a Missionary. Previously, the Revs. John Hobbs and J.H. Bumby had explored the prospects of establishing a South Island Mission, and they had reported favourably to the Board. In addition, in 1839, the Otakou chiefs, Karetai and Taiaroa were in Sydney and they urged their claims for a Missionary and reasoned thus:-

*"Why should the people of the North Island have Missionaries and Churches and Schools, while we have none? What is good for the North Island is good for the South. Give us Missionaries and Churches and Schools. We desire our children to learn the Truths of Christianity. We want them to be able to read and write like the children in the North Island. We want our wives and daughters to cook and sew and care for the aged. Give us Missionaries and we will welcome them to our Kaikas".*

As a result of these various representations, Mr. Watkin was appointed to Waikouaiti, now known as Karitane, as a centre from which he could visit the native settlements of

the south. The pioneer and his devoted wife and children arrived at their destination on May 16th. 1840 to take up their difficult task.



**Rev. James Watkin**

Difficulties innumerable beset them at every turn. Nevertheless with patient and persistent toil Mr. Watkin set himself to overcome them. Naturally he asked, "Who is sufficient for these things?" The answer came, "Our sufficiency is of God". This was the beginning of a new day for the Maori.

When the Maori people of Otakou heard of the arrival in their district, of a Pakeha Missionary, just two hours' journey away by canoe, their joy and curiosity knew no bounds. Little time was lost in making their acquaintance with the Missionary and his good wife. Mr. Watkin's journeys to Otakou were made on foot and by canoe or boat, and were attended with much danger. However he was encouraged to find his efforts repaid. He found the intellectual capacity of the people generally of a high order. Many of them had fine intelligent countenances, with the expansive forehead of the philosopher. The briefest intercourse with them was quite sufficient to convince him that he was dealing with receptive and enquiring minds. He discovered that some of the men were admirable speakers - their manner being very animated and full of natural and appropriate gesture. Such men were Korako and Te Kahu who in due time became preachers to their own people. The Missionary entered into his work with the energy that was characteristic of the pioneers, and in a short time results were visible. These results increased steadily, and Mr. Watkin in one of his reports says,

*"Christianity appears to be exciting considerable attention among the Maori people, and some of them come from far to see me. A Missionary who has had a precursor, knows little of the trouble of beginning a mission. Teaching them to read is a hard matter, but I am cheered when they can spell a short word without hesitation. How glad I shall be when any of them shall be able to read".*

## A FIRST CONVERT

One of the Chiefs who first professed the Christian Faith, was the noted warrior Haereroa who took part in the last battle at Tukurau in 1837. He was a chief of the best type, and had become proficient in the English language. He was one of the Missionary's apt pupils, and at the same time helped his teacher in compiling his Maori vocabulary and in his pronunciation of the South Island dialect.



Haereroa

Mr. Watkin wrote regarding Haereroa:-

*"Had a conversation with this Maori, who formerly lived with us, and who now resides at some short distance (Otakou Heads) - one who can speak English ten times better than the whites here can speak Maori. He has lately become anxious for knowledge. For some time formerly he had assisted the whalers by notifying them of the proximity of whales by the means of a beacon. A party of whalers reached his place, and the first question was 'Well, have you seen any whales lately?'*

*'Yes, I saw one on Sunday',*

*'Why didn't you make a smoke?'*

*'Because it was the Sacred day'.*

*'Ugh.' are you turned Missionary (Christian)?' and other abuse.*

*'I am very ignorant' he said, 'but I wish to keep God's commandments.*

*'What God? The Maori God?'*

*'No. The Missionary God'.*

*They said, 'The Missionary lives a long way off, he would not have seen you'.*

*'True', he replied, 'But God would see me. He sees everything'.*

*'Oh', they said, 'they were taught such things when they were children, but now they have cast them off.'*

*'And where will you go when you die?' he enquired, telling them that hell was the place for evil doers.*

*This they laughed at of course, and would fain have persuaded him there was nothing beyond the grave, but without effect".*

This noble chief died in 1870 but his descendants are members of our Church today.

Neat little churches were erected in Otakou at the Ruatitiko and Tahakopa Kaikas, wherein daily services were held, and several times on Sundays. Services were also held in Weller's whaling store at Omati, a few yards from the site of the lately erected Centennial Memorial Church. Mr. Watkin preached in clerical gown and used Wesley's version of the Book of Common Prayer.

One of the most direct results of the Missionary work was the creation of a body of Native preachers, teachers and pastors. They have a remarkable record for faithfulness and devotion, and it would have been impossible to have carried the work on effectively but for them. Some of these twenty six faithful men were engaged in preaching the Gospel to their own countrymen and in instructing the children of the Kaikas and Hapus (Sub-tribes) with great effect.

Mr. Watkin was transferred to Wellington in June 1844, and he left behind him a well-organised Church.

## **TREATY OF WAITANGI**

On June 13th. 1840, *H.M.S.Herald* called at the Otakou Heads. Major Bunbury landed and secured the signatures of the Chiefs Karetai and Korako, to the Treaty. At that time Tairaoa was absent on a visit south to Ruapuke, but his signature, with those of Tuhawaiki and Kaikoura had been obtained at that place on the 9th. Thus the Maori people acknowledged British Rule, and Queen Victoria as their lawful Sovereign. The Treaty would have been a great asset to the Southern Maoris if its provisions had been faithfully carried out, and especially regarding the terms of the "Deed of Purchase" signed later, when valuable tribal lands, known as the Otago Block passed from the hands of the Maori for European settlement. The Maori people today, while recognising the benefits they have derived from the Treaty of Waitangi, yet suffer



keenly from a sense of injustice regarding the infringement of the terms of the sale of their lands. As a Church we must feel a sense of responsibility, seeing that our Missionaries advised the acceptance of this Treaty and Deed with the assurance that they would be honourably observed.

## REV. CHARLES CREED

The Rev. James Watkin "blazed the trail" in the South Island, and was followed by the Rev. Charles Creed who was thirty two years of age and of strong physique. He had an intimate knowledge of native mentality, and observed the strict codes of Maori etiquette. He had a genius for understanding the people to whom he ministered. To the Maori he was a Maori. He loved the dusky people of his charge and they in turn loved him. Such was the man who for nine years sustained and developed the work.



Rev. Charles Creed

One or two quotations from his journal will indicate the type of his labours:-

*"Sept.4th. Early this morning, I preached from the subject of 'The Barren Fig Tree'. The congregation very attentive. In the afterno on examined the candidates for baptism. We afterwards prepared a temporary place with boat sails for the services of the Sabbath, the usual building being too small to accommodate the*

*people. In the evening I preached from Galations vi, 7—8. The word seemed to hold the people."*

*"Sept.15th. Prayer meeting this morning. About 80 present. At 10 o'clock the bell was rung for service; from one to two hundred present, to whom I preached from Matthew xi, 28-29. After the service twenty adults and two children were solemnly baptised in the name of the adorable Trinity. One of these was a young man, a chief from Ruapuke of considerable influence. Most of the chiefs of the neighbourhood were present as a mark of respect to those who were baptised".*

*"Sept.16. I returned to the village (Ruatitiko, Otakou) at 5 p.m. Preached to the natives. In the evening I renewed the tickets of membership to the classes. The young men who act as leaders conduct themselves with great propriety and are very intelligent".*

These brief notes throw much light upon the work of this keen Missionary.

## **THE SCOTTISH PIONEERS**

When the immigrant ship "*John Wycliffe*" arrived at Koputai (Port Chalmers), Mr. Creed was there to meet the new arrivals and to welcome the several Methodists on board. When the "*Philip Laing*" arrived with the second draft of settlers, Mr. Creed was on the landing stage, and on the following Sunday conducted service in the Barracks at 6.30, the Rev. Thomas Burns having conducted the morning one. Mr. Burns described Mr. Creed as "an excellent man", and expressed the hope that they would be able to strengthen each other's hands.

## **THE REV. W. KIRK**

The Rev. W. Kirk followed Mr. Creed in 1854, and spent four years of zealous service, Mr. Kirk was "in labours abundant", and made an inefaceable impression on the minds of Maori and Pakeha. He was a good Maori scholar and was beloved by the Maori people.

## **THE REV. GEORGE STANNARD.**

The Rev. George Stannard was the fourth Minister. For some time he resided in the Ruatitiko Manse which was attached to the Church. He had the joy of receiving the great chief Taiaroa into full membership in the Church.

This chief belonged to the old fighting race of chiefs and took a leading part in the defence of Kaiapohia immediately preceding its capture by Te Rauparaha in 1831. Sometime after that, Taiaroa carried the war into the enemy's camp and in one of their encounters, the great Te Rauparaha only escaped with his life by hiding in the kelp amongst the rocks. Taiaroa also took a leading part in the last battle at Tuturau in 1837.



Te Matenga Taiaroa

The conversion of Taiaroa was sincere and had far reaching results. On April 3rd. 1859, he, with his wife Karorina, was publicly baptised and received into the Church upon confession of faith. The ceremony took place before a crowded congregation. As a proof of sincerity, Taiaroa was anxious to erect an ornate Church building in or near Omati, as more central, than Ruatitiko which was also becoming depopulated by reason of, the sanddrifts. It was agreed, with the consent of the tribe, to dedicate ten acres on the Omati Flat, for the Church, Parsonage and burial ground. In those days the Wesleyan authorities were reluctant to receive native lands, so accordingly the section was set apart as a "Native Mission Reserve" with no denominational colour. From that time efforts were made to raise funds for the proposed Church. Offerings were taken up at the Church Services, and subscriptions were gathered. These, with a small grant from the Government were set apart for the project. Mr. Stannard however, was not privileged to see the church erected, and it was not until the Rev. J.F.Reimenschneider was appointed to Otakou that it was opened for Divine Worship.

### **THE WORK OF REV. J. F. REIMENSCHMEIDER AND SUBSEQUENT ACTIVITIES.**

When Mr. Stannard removed from the District early in 1859, the work was carried on by laymen and native Wesleyan Preachers. The Rev, J.F.Reimenschneider took charge of the Mission in 1862 and continued until his death in 1866.

Mrs. Relmenschneider was a daughter, of the Rev. W. Woon who arrived in New Zealand in 1834. Having been brought up in a Mission Station, and being fluent in the Maori language, she was able to secone all her husband's efforts for the well-being of the people. She played the organ at all services and taught in the day and Sunday

Schools. This Missionary was supported by a committee of laymen in Dunedin. He continued the practice of his predecessors and the Church Bell was rung daily for morning and evening prayers. The Wesleyan Hymn and Prayer books were used at all services as in Mr. Watkin's day. A small cottage parsonage was erected behind the Church and it commanded an enchanting view of the harbour. The Missionary planted an avenue of trees leading from the Church to the Cottage, which stood on a well kept lawn surrounded by flower beds. The avenue of trees remains to this day, but the cottage has long since disappeared, Mr. Reimenschneider's labours were unduly short. He died on Aug. 26th.1866 and his mortal remains repose in the old Port Chalmers Cemetery.



**Rev. J. F. Reimenschneider**

From 1866 onwards the work has been continued by Methodists, Anglicans, Baptists and Presbyterians. Today our own Methodist Church is the only witness for God in that District. Special mention, however, must be made of the work at Otakou in 1892, during the ministry of the Rev. W. Salter. A great spiritual revival took place, when very many Maoris and Europeans were converted. It was a great work of Grace. The whole of the people of the Peninsula were stirred and impressed from Taiaroa Head to Broad Bay.

## **THE CENTENNIAL CHURCH.**

In view of the Centenary of the establishment of the first Christian Mission in the South Island, of which Otakou was the main part, a meeting of the Maori people was held in June 1937 to discuss the proposals. The Rev. T. Skuse, and the present writer plac-ed before the people the question of erecting a new permanent Church on the old site, as a Centennial commemoration. The Rev. T. A. Pybus explained the relationship

## **OTAKAU A Story of Far-off Days by T.A.Pybus**

of the Church to the land, showing that the reserve was not Methodist Property but a Native Mission Reserve for all time. The meeting agreed to apply for the transfer of one acre to the Methodist Church under local Trustees and this transfer was facilitated at the Native Land Court held in Dunedin on January 29th. 1938.

The Chairman of the District, Rev. C. H. Olds convened a meeting in Dunedin, of those interested in the project of the Otakou Memorial Church. To enable the scheme to come under the National Centennial group of memorials, it was later decided to incorporate in the building a section for a Sanctuary Museum to contain the tribal relics, with a view to the united scheme being recognised as a memorial to the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi by the South Island chiefs. The chiefs who were associated with the Wesleyan Mission, and who signed the Treaty at Otakou on June 13th. 1840, are all buried in the local cemetery. The only exception was, one chief who perished at sea. The submission of this modified scheme, with the Church to be erected in Maori design, resulted in its recognition by the Government as a National Centennial Memorial. An additional importance had been recognised, inasmuch as the signing of the Treaty at Otakou had preceded the proclamation of Sovereignty at Cloudy Bay, and also the hoisting of the British Flag at Akaroa. A subsidy was given from the central Fund of one pound for every three collected. Upon the same conditions, the Otago Harbour Board subscribed £150, the Dunedin Savings Bank Trust £500, the Koputai Trust £100, while various Dunedin public bodies, business firms, lodges and individuals contributed freely. A much appreciated grant was that of £500 from the Methodist Centennial Thanksgiving Fund.

On Feb. 24th. 1940, during the sessions of the Methodist Conference in Dunedin, the foundation stones were laid in the presence of 3,000 people. The President of the Centennial Conference, Rev. L. B. Neale. B.A. presided. A Native welcome was extended by the local Maori people. Wreaths were laid upon the graves of the great chiefs who had signed the Treaty of Waitangi. One was also laid upon the grave of the chief Ngatata who had signed the Treaty and the Deed of Purchase for the Wellington Tribes.

One foundation stone was unveiled to the memory of the Rev. James Watkin. This was performed by Rev. L. B. Neale and Miss Watkin, a grand-daughter of the pioneer Missionary. The Waitangi tablet was unveiled by Messrs G. Karetai and D. Taiaroa. Amongst a great group of representatives of the Government and the Church, appeared the Rev. Professor Albiston, the official visitor to the Centennial Conference from the General Conference of Australasia.

Thirteen Months later, on March 22nd. 1941, the Centennial Church was opened for worship. The President of the Conference, Rev. W. A. Burley M.A. presided over a gathering of some two thousand people. Many distinguished people were present. The Church was opened by Miss A. Karetai, grand-daughter of the great chief of that name. The Architects presented Miss Karetai with a gold key, and on the opening of the door, the people reverently filed into the Church where a service was conducted

## OTAKAU A Story of Far-off Days by T.A.Pybus

(in the Maori language) by the Revs. E. Te Tuhi and R. P. Rakena. The address was given in English by the President.

The Church, with its Maori designs and architecture, both interior and exterior, presents a very striking appearance and is unique in New Zealand, and probably in the world. The Tukatuku panelling in the chancel was the work of Taranaki craftswomen. The Taiaroa Memorial Altar, the chancel chair, and reading desk, all in Maori design, are very attractively completed. The pulpit which contains some of the original parts of the one built by the Rev. J. F. Reimenschneider, stands on the left of the chancel. The lead-light window in the chancel, with a Maori Mission motif, bears the inscription:-

*"To the Glory of God and in Memory of the Pioneer Missionaries, Native teachers and Pastors who established in these parts the first Christian Mission, commencing with the arrival of the Rev. James Watkin at Waikouaiti on May 16th. 1840".*



**The opening of the Otakou Maori Centennial Church**

The Sanctuary Museum contains many valuable exhibits, among them being the famous Kawakawa Stone which is the heirloom of the Southern Maori People. It has been handed down for approximately 200 years and shows evidences of primitive workmanship. This was presented by Mr. Riki Taiaroa. There are manuscript notes by

**OTAKAU A Story of Far-off Days by T.A.Pybus**

Revs. James Watkin and Samuel Marsden, in addition to many tribal relics and photographs of chiefs of other days.

The building, in early 1941, has cost approximately £3,600. There is still much to be done in the way of fencing, draining and laying out of the grounds, but it is anticipated that at the end of this year, the whole project will be free of debt.

Thus at the commencement of the second century of Christianity in the South Island, there stands a unique and worthy Sanctuary in the care and ownership of the Methodist Church of New Zealand.



**The interior of the Otakou Maori Memorial Church**

[Online Editor's Note: There were no photos in the original booklet, these have been added to this version.]