

Wind and Shifting Sands
Sensing Place and Identity on Chatham Island
1850-1950

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Abstract

The climate and environment of Chatham Island shatters romantic notions of the sun-drenched Pacific paradise. Part of New Zealand since 1842, these cold-water islands are seldom included in nationalistic thought, and Chatham Islanders rarely identify as New Zealanders. Historically, this small and diverse population shared a separate set of life circumstances, in a distinctive environment where natural elements shaped the *modus operandi* of everyday life. Historians acknowledge this sense of difference, but past lives, and the evolution of the characteristic Chatham Islander, have never been studied in any depth. Perceptions of place and difference are at the core of this thesis.

Based on the premise that sense impressions are our windows on the world, this thesis examines the role of nature and environment in shaping place and identity. Adopting a multi-disciplinary approach, it shows how this dynamic natural environment shaped individuals and society. Through everyday dealings with bogs, mud, and unpredictable seas, it reveals how sense-impressions mediated interactions with environment, with one another, and with the outside world. Inclusive of social relations, livelihoods, and routines, it studies the effects of sensed and felt experiences on mood and emotion, aspects seldom included in social histories of place and community. A sensory approach helps interpret and make sense of complex and multi-layered perceptions of environment and place, to uncover the lived and felt experiences of the Chatham Islanders between 1850 and 1950.

Reimagined as part of a terraqueous whole, a confluence of weather systems, waves, tides, and currents, Chatham Island is situated within its wider Pacific environment. Diffusing boundaries, a terraqueous approach highlights aspects of permeability, vulnerability, and exchange. These fusions of elements dramatically affected shores and surrounding seas, hindering shipping and communication. Less-easily conceived are the perennial difficulties of in-island mobility. Terrain and weather significantly impeded movement and affected the nature and timing of institutional development and infrastructure, most notably roading. Social atomisation had adverse effects on the individual and collective psyche, but conversely, when explored through the geographical concept of time-space compression, a slower pace of life is shown to preserve sensory engagement with environment, and to inscribe this place with more positive meanings.

Commonality of experience strengthened bonds between island peoples, and isolation was overcome through basic tenets of care, expressed through hospitality, the gathering and sharing of food, and community responsibility in times of sickness and need. Isolation from without was often keenly felt, and by considering the movement of people, mail, and newspapers, and the advent of wireless telegraphy and radio broadcasting, this thesis shows connections with the outside world were crucial in alleviating a sense of distance and deprivation. Distance and difference did generate certain insular characteristics which shaped the unique identity of the Chatham Islander, and the human personality gradually merged with its milieu, but as this thesis contends, these self-imposed borders did not always work to the islander's advantage in dealings with mainland officialdom. Yet, psychological boundaries between insiders and outsiders were more malleable than they first appear.

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Preface

One evening in January 1967, as darkness descended, I sat in the sandhills overlooking Skirmish Bay on Chatham Island. After three days unloading building materials brought from Dunedin, *Holmburn* was sailing for the mainland. The cray fishing boom was underway, and my father and brothers were about to build a fish factory and freezer plant at Kaingaroa. As an eleven-year-old, I was already having the adventure of my life. We had arrived by Sunderland flying boat a few weeks earlier. After landing on Te Whanga Lagoon, we crossed its four-mile ford by tractor and trailer. At Kaingaroa Station we enjoyed our first island meal of roast swan, new potatoes, and lettuce salad. Dunedin was my home, but until that moment, sitting in the sandhills, I had been too busy exploring my new environment to even give it a thought. Before long, I could no longer hear the thrum of the ship's engine, and I watched intently until its lights disappeared from view. For the first time, I had an overwhelming sense of being a long way from where my life was anchored, of being separated by a vast ocean, of having come onto and being on an island.

Over the course of this project, I have been challenged to consider the difference between going "onto an island" and being "unto an island". Landscape geographer Kenneth Olwig gives an enlightening converse view to my moment in the sandhills. He imagines an islander leaving for the first time, standing on the deck of a ship, and watching a familiar coastline disappear. According to Olwig, this parting scene helps "create a reflective sense of identity"; although separated in a physical sense, in the mind's eye, the roving islander retains a vision of that place, an innate sense of identity centred "on the fact of being unto an island". He describes this condition as "islandcentric".¹ By comparison, my moment was purely mainland-centric, yet it was also fleeting. I have many happy memories of 11 months spent on Chatham Island. This place left an indelible imprint, an enduring sense of fondness, attachment, and interest. From this, and other experiences of place, I can strongly relate to Nigel Thrift's suggestion that "*places are 'passings' that 'haunt' 'us'*".²

¹ Kenneth R. Olwig, "Are Islanders Insular? A Personal View*," *Geographical Review* 97, no. 2 (2007): 186.

² Nigel Thrift, "Steps to an Ecology of Place," in *Human Geography Today*, ed. Doreen B. Massey, John Allen, and Philip Sarre (Cambridge: Malden, Mass.: Cambridge: Polity Press; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1999), 310.

In “Childhood Haunts”, historian Annabel Cooper maintains that places are “much more formative than we might anticipate”.³ Only in hindsight do we realise how much our lives are shaped “in and through” the topographies of places, “their climates, their light, their buildings, plants and spaces, the people who occupy them with you, the traces of people there before you”.⁴ Although largely indefinable, some quality, some element of place steals upon you, and perhaps “secretly” plants within you.⁵ It was the hauntings of another child that resonated with my own sensory engagement with Chatham Island, and determined the direction of this thesis.

³ Annabel Cooper, “Childhood Haunts,” in *Extraordinary Anywhere: Essays on Place from Aotearoa New Zealand*, ed. Ingrid Horrocks and Cherie Lacey (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2016), 107.

⁴ Ibid., 107, 19.

⁵ Ibid., 107-08.

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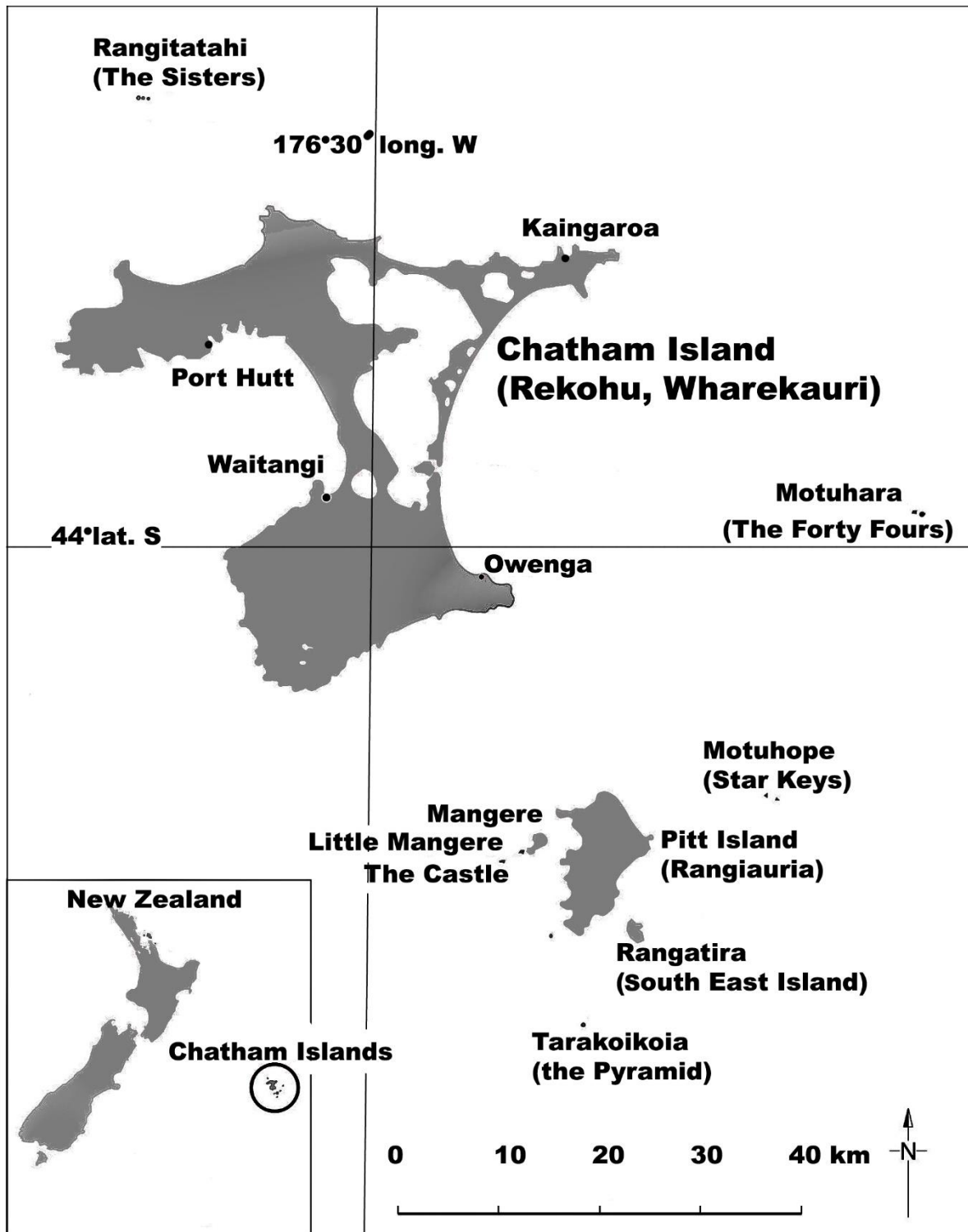
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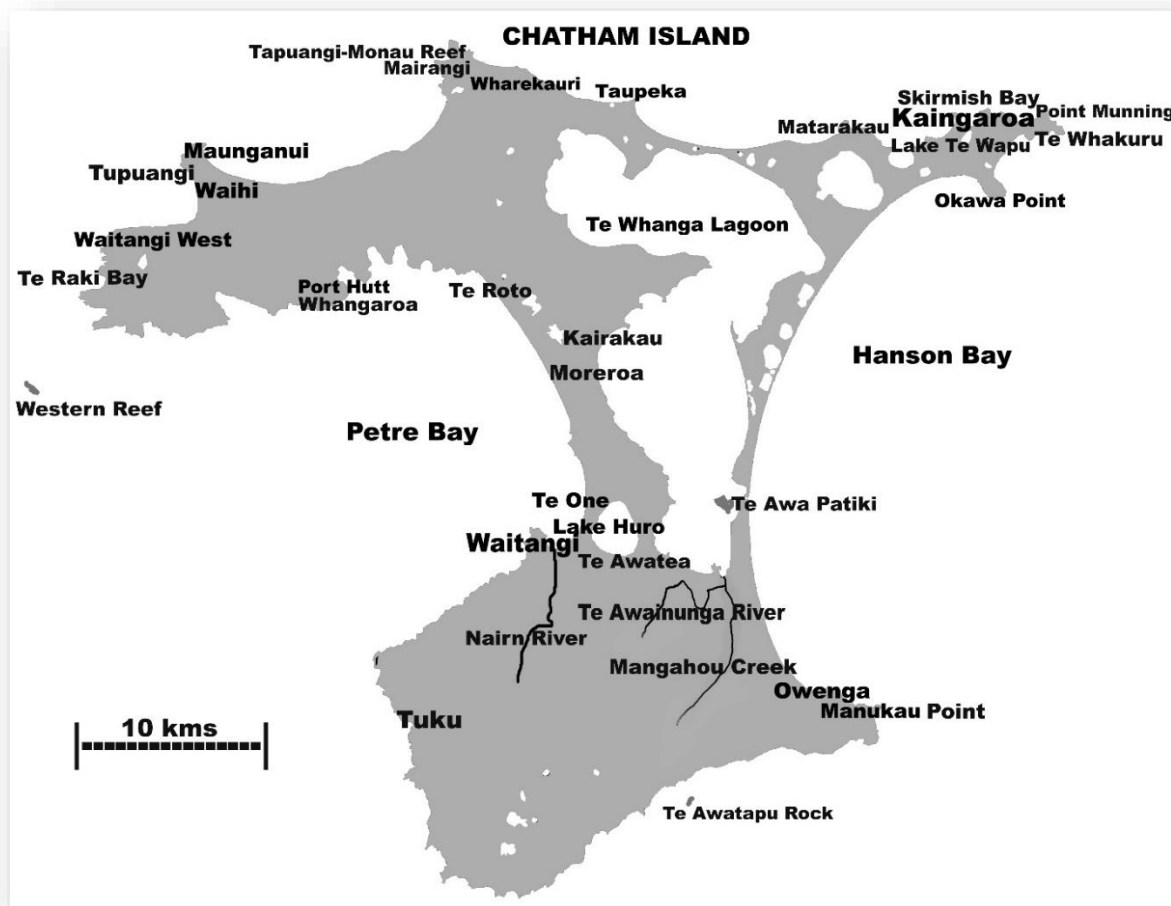
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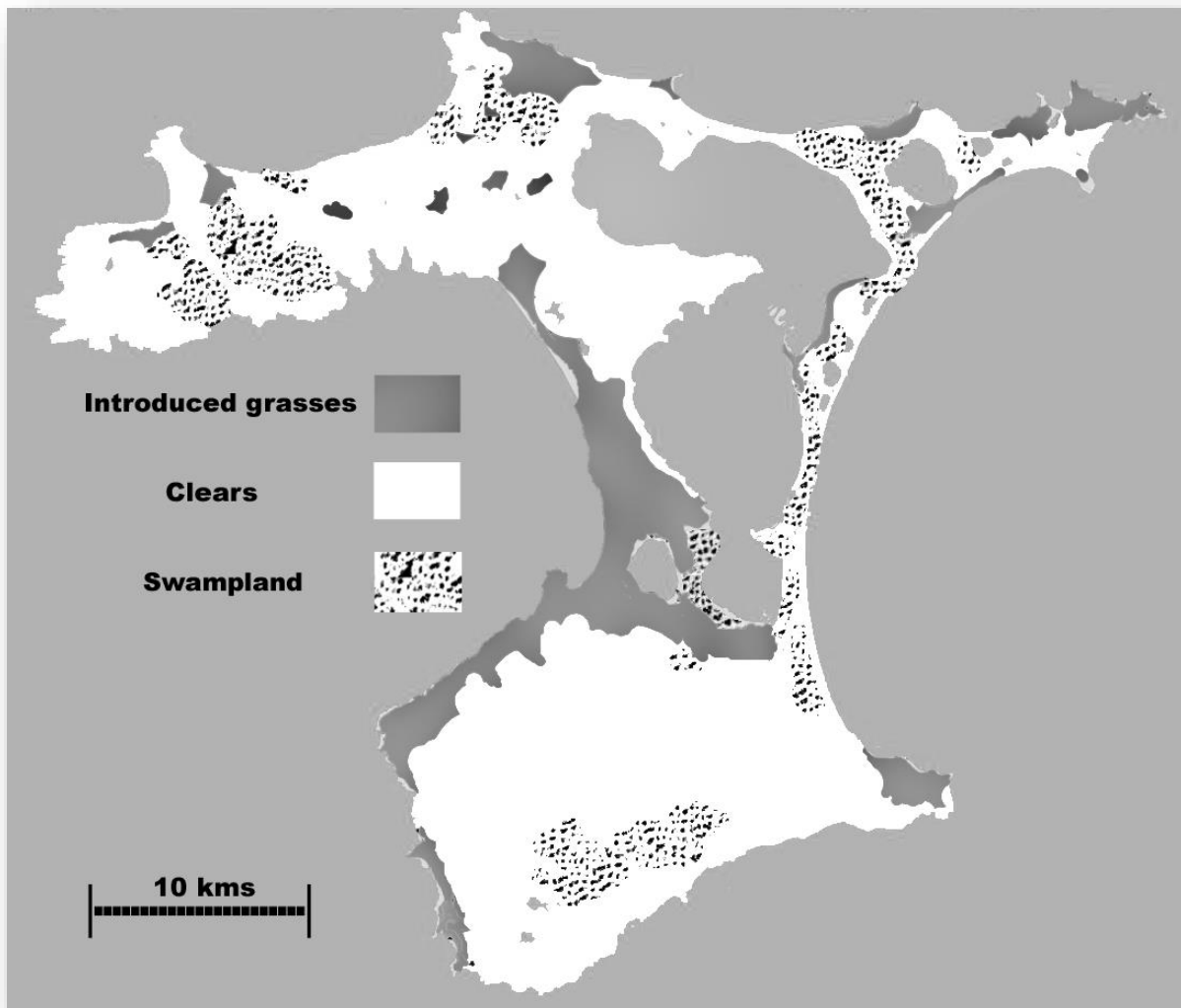
Maps



Map 1: The Chatham Islands and position in relation to New Zealand

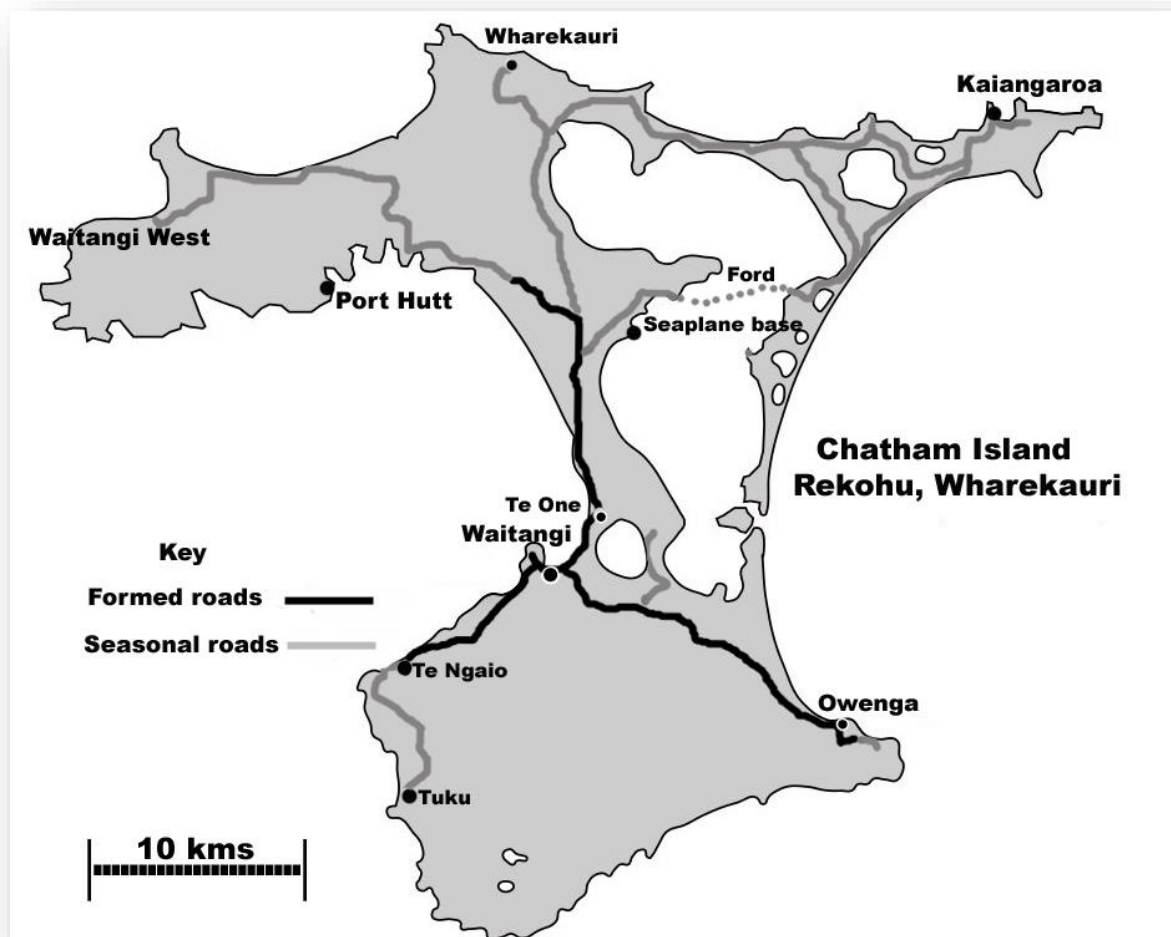


Map 2: Chatham Island locations



Map 3: Clears, swamps and grassland on Chatham Island, 1954.⁶

⁶ Adapted from a map in Eileen L. Elliott, "Chatham Island: A Study in Arrested Development," *New Zealand Geographer* 12, no. 2 (1956): 161.



Map 4: Roads and seasonal tracks, Chatham Island, 1962.⁷

⁷ Adapted from Rhys Richards, "An Historical Geography of Chatham Island" (MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, New Zealand, 1962).

Introduction: A Sense of Place

In 1871, seven-year-old Amy Briscoe arrived at Waitangi, the principal settlement of the Chathams. Coming from Merseyside in England, she found nothing picturesque about the tiny township situated in a sheltered corner of Petre Bay. There was a court house and post office, two stores, a blacksmith's shop, and a few other buildings on the beach. When Amy wrote about her experiences 65 years later, she described everything as "extremely primitive" and temporary in appearance.¹ Social connections between scattered landowners were restricted by the lack of roads, and she remembered no communal activities during four years there. Despite the obvious disadvantages, Amy was far from disparaging about that period in her life. It seems that other, less tangible factors, shaped her impressions of the island.

According to historian John Gillis, islands are among the few places we feel cosmically connected.² Amy's sensory response to environment suggests this was her experience. She wrote:

I was an only child, and had no playmates – the beach, the waves, and the shells were my companions. The shells that were washed ashore were very beautiful. Some were of the brightest, others of the softest of colours. There were large shells of gorgeous hues and the tiniest little winkles, no bigger than a pin's head. The seasonal colourings of the bay were a constant joy to me: they were ever-changing, ever beautiful. Having the freedom of the beach I could be abroad early, and the soft and glorious shadings of the sunrises made a deep impression on my childish mind; I wondered and wondered whether heaven behind all that could possibly be more beautiful. It is from such scenes as these that one develops a love of colour.³

Amy's enduring memories testify to the magic of place, the power of unadulterated nature to instil a sense of reverence and wonderment. Attempts to implant modernity

¹ Amy Hellaby, "Early Days in the Chatham Islands," in *Tales of Pioneer Women*, ed. Airini E. Woodhouse (Auckland: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1940), 264.

² John R. Gillis, *Islands of the Mind: How the Human Imagination Created the Atlantic World*, 1 ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 3.

³ Hellaby, 264.

had a negligible impact on her psyche; instead, through the intensity of these special moments, her opinion was shaped by the pleasing sensory qualities of her daily commune with nature. The feel of the sand, the beauty of the shells, the sounds of the sea, and the majesty of the sky, came together to symbolise the very essence of heaven. Intangible, yet profound qualities resonated with her soul, creating a sense of connection reaching deep into her spiritual consciousness. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan describes that special moment, when “beauty is felt as the sudden contact with an aspect of reality previously not experienced before; it is the antithesis of the acquired taste for certain landscapes, or the warm feeling of places we know well”.⁴

Amy was certainly not alone in her response. Island-born Maude Seymour, writing in the 1920s, found that those who lived on the Chathams for some years before moving to New Zealand were very often “lured back to their original home”. She attributed this to “an attraction which cannot be described but which is nevertheless forceful”.⁵ In 1952, at 14 years of age, Val Mete left for further education in New Zealand, and never lived there again. Yet, 60 years later, she still claimed that, “rain, hail, sunshine, wind, dust or mud”, the Chatham Islands would always be her “piece of paradise”.⁶ These sentiments confirm my own convictions that in any social history of the Chatham Islands, the people cannot be separated from their environment; the sea, wind, mud, bogs and shifting sand that dictated lives and livelihoods.

This thesis is about sense of place and identity within a dynamic island setting. It examines the role of nature and environment in shaping individuals and society, to answer its central question: How did it feel to live on Chatham Island between 1850 and 1950? Scholars across the family of humanities have long-contended with those “elusive but important” elements of place.⁷ This thesis takes its cue from Tony Ballantyne’s challenge to the primacy of the nation as the key component of historical analysis in New Zealand.⁸ He advocates site-specific studies that trace the social relations, rhythms and routines taking shape in very real material environments, and urges closer attention to

⁴ Yi-fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 94.

⁵ Maud Ella Seymour, “A History of the Chatham Islands” (MA Thesis, University of New Zealand, 1924), 78.

⁶ Elaine W. Soanes, preface to *Growing up a Chatham Islander: On the Edge of 44 Degrees South*, by Val Mete (Nukaka N.Z.: Island Moonlight Pub., 2012).

⁷ Cooper, 108.

⁸ Tony Ballantyne, “On Place, Space and Mobility in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand,” *New Zealand Journal of History* 45, no. 1 (2011): 50. “Chop Suey Patties and Histories of Place,” in *Extraordinary Anywhere: Essays on Place from Aotearoa New Zealand*, ed. Ingrid Horrocks and Cherie Lacey (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2016), 57.

landscape itself, how it “influenced the nature and timing of institutional development”.⁹ The Chatham Islands presents as the ideal location for such a study. Comprised of a diverse group of New Zealanders, living in an isolated location and challenging environment, they are under-represented in New Zealand historiography. In fact, as Ballantyne points out, the islands do not even appear on many maps of New Zealand. He suspects the Chathams have seldom been imagined as part of New Zealand at all.¹⁰

In order to “grapple with questions of location, space and scale ... thinking under and beyond, as well as across the nation”, Ballantyne urges scholars to reconnect with the “actual places where people lived, loved, and raised families”.¹¹ I am interested in how people lived and felt a sense of place at the Chathams. Rather than focus on environmental history alone, I embrace a sensory approach as an overarching device to help interpret and make sense of complex and multi-layered perceptions of place. By defining the peculiar characteristics of everyday life on Chatham Island, I provide new historical insights into the effects of environment, climate, isolation, and implied psychological separation; aspects seldom included in social histories of place and community. Focusing on the period 1850 to 1950, I investigate how the senses mediated islander interactions with their surroundings, with one another, and the world beyond their shores. I consider how “connections and movements” of people, goods, money and news “actually *made* places”.¹² Methodologically, I follow the lead taken by historian Katie Pickles, who considers environmental events in New Zealand as sensed and felt experiences that effect mood and emotion.¹³

Defining place

From the 1970s, human geographers have adopted “place” as an idea, a concept, and a way of being in the world, thus promoting deeper historical understandings of place and environment.¹⁴ Historian and geographer, Tim Cresswell, defines place as “meaningful segments of space, locations imbued with meaning and power”. Once we become attached to a place, “we fight over it and exclude people from it, we experience it”.¹⁵ Yi-

⁹ Ballantyne, “On Space”, 61.

¹⁰ Ibid., 56.

¹¹ Ballantyne, “Chop Suey”, 65.

¹² Ballantyne, “On Space”, 60.

¹³ Katie Pickles, “Postcolonial Environments,” in *Making a New Land: Environmental Histories of New Zealand*, ed. Eric Pawson and Tom Brooking (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2013), 262.

¹⁴ Tim Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction* (Chichester, England; Oxford, England: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 35.

¹⁵ Ibid., 2.

Fu Tuan, a key figure in human geography, has studied perceptions, attitudes, and values surrounding people's lived environs. He introduced the term "topophilia" (from Greek *topos* "place" and *-philia*, "love of") to describe a strong sense of place, and how place becomes mixed with a sense of cultural identity.¹⁶ Historian Greg Denning adapts the "natural metaphor" of the Oceanic world to explain how shores and beaches signify both physical and cultural boundaries, and stand as a metaphor "for the different ways in which human beings construct their worlds, and for the boundaries they construct between them". People create figurative islands around them, shaped by the reality "they attribute to their categories, their roles, their institutions, and the beaches they put around them with their definitions of 'we' and 'they'".¹⁷ These concepts interest scholars across the social sciences, and theories of rootedness, "islandness", mobility, isolation, distance, and communication provide conceptual rigour to this study of the Chatham Islands.¹⁸

The Chatham Islands are an archipelago lying in the South Pacific Ocean some 800 kilometres east of New Zealand. Situated at a similar latitude to the city of Christchurch they sit on the Chatham Rise, a submerged peninsula stretching approximately 1,000 kilometres east from the Canterbury coastline; this is one of the most dangerous shipping passages in the world.¹⁹ Around the islands, warm, sub-tropical currents from the north and north-east converge with colder Antarctic waters from the south, to create unpredictable currents which have claimed many ships.²⁰ The international dateline detours slightly to the east of the islands, to bring it in line with New Zealand's calendar date, but they are sufficiently distant to merit a separate time zone. Hence, the group is 12 hours and 45 minutes ahead of Greenwich Mean Time, and 45 minutes ahead of mainland New Zealand.

With a total area of over 90,000 hectares, Chatham Island is by far the largest of the group with a resident population of approximately 600 people.²¹ The indigenous

¹⁶ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974).

¹⁷ Greg Denning, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land: Marquesas, 1774-1880* (Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1980), 3.

¹⁸ "Islandness" is a term used in island studies to describe the shared characteristics of island dwellers.

¹⁹ Allan A. Kirk, *Fair Winds and Rough Seas: The Story of the Holm Shipping Company* (Wellington, N.Z.: Reed, 1975), 56.

²⁰ Fiona Holmes, *Chatham Islands Rekohu, 1791-1984* (Waitangi, Chatham Islands: Self-published, 1984), 87.

²¹ Jason Leung Wai and Nicola Morton, "Chatham Islands Economic Profile: Final Report," (New Zealand: Martin Jenkins & Associates Limited, 2014), 6. Accessed February 12, 2016, <http://www.cic.govt.nz/>

Moriori called this place Rēkohu, meaning “misty skies”, and Māori gave it the name Wharekauri. The land is generally low in profile, broken only in the north and north-east by conical volcanic peaks rising to between 110 and 180 metres, features which were often commented on by early visitors. The highest point, at 299 metres, is situated in the high southern tableland near Green Point.²² Te Whanga Lagoon occupies over 20,000 hectares; once a deep bay, this opens to the sea every four or five years, and the water remains salt.²³ Numerous other small lakes dot the landscape, and beaches and sand dunes cover a further 5000 hectares. Large areas of peat and deep natural swamp are covered with fern and low shrub. Underground peat fires are common, and early observers commented that “the island seemed to be on fire”.²⁴ These leave large holes and chasms that undermine existing tracks.

Waitangi is the main port and centre of administration, and home to the Chatham Islands County Council, the smallest local authority in New Zealand. Today, there is a general store, café and takeaway, a four-bed hospital, bank, post office, museum, fish processing factory, and one hotel. In earlier years, the nearby community of Te One, some four kilometres distant, was likened to an English village, and regarded as the centre of Pākehā culture. The island’s largest school is sited there. Approximately half of the population live in Te One and Waitangi areas. The other settlements are principally centred on larger farming properties or fishing villages. On the south-east coast, Owenga has survived periods of economic rise and decline, conditions shared by Kaingaroa in the north-east, and Port Hutt or Whangaroa to the north-west. Population numbers in these remoter settlements have ebbed and flowed according to the condition of the fishing industry. Sheep farming and fishing remain the principal industries.

In earlier years, these outlying areas remained relatively isolated. Land-based mobility was severely impeded by the lack of roads, and access by sea was often treacherous. Horses remained the principal means of transport on the island until well into the 1950s. Farmers closer to Waitangi could access a jetty or wharf from the early 1900s, but for most, the shipping of produce was difficult and time-consuming. Wool

documents/2015/06/economic-profile-chatham-islands-report.pdf/. In the period under study, the total population ranged from 800 in 1850, to 520 in 1950. The average throughout was 550 persons. At its lowest point in 1863 the population stood at 220. This coincided with many Māori returning to Taranaki, and in 1868, only 20 Māori remained. Many subsequently returned.

²² Fiona Holmes, 84.

²³ Michael King, *A Land Apart: The Chatham Islands of New Zealand* (Auckland: Random Century, 1990), 3.

²⁴ Fiona Holmes, 88. Holmes quotes John (or Jacky) Marmon, a cabin boy on the sealing vessel “Commerce” c. 1807.

was carted by bullock dray to the nearest beach, and surfboats ferried goods between ship and shore. There are numerous accounts of this hazardous undertaking.

Pitt Island (Rangiaotea to Moriori and Rangiauria to Māori), lies 23 kilometres to the south-east of Chatham, across the turbulent waters of Pitt Strait. With an area of over 6000 hectares, in appearance, Pitt does not resemble its larger neighbour.²⁵ The southern coast is edged with high cliffs and pinnacles with razor-back ridges, and large tracts of native bush remain. The remainder is green rolling hills and productive farmland. Pitt is home to about 30 people, but population growth has been limited by the absence of a natural harbour. There is no single settlement, but most communal activity centres on the wharf at Flower Pot at the northern end. South East Island, or Rangitira, the third largest of the group, is relatively close by, but uninhabited. Its 218 hectares was farmed for a time.²⁶ A number of smaller rocky outcrops and reefs lie within a radius of 50 kilometres, including Mangere, Little Mangere, The Sisters, Star Keys, The Pyramid, The Castle and The Forty Fours.²⁷

Politically, the Chatham Islands are a county of New Zealand, and have never been part of any province.²⁸ Annexed in 1842, parliamentary representation was not granted for another 80 years. Prior to 1855, the island was colonised without organised government, church, or military presence. From 1855, central government delivered services through a Resident Magistrate. Ordinary New Zealand law applied, and only occasionally have aspects been modified to take account of “the islands special circumstances”.²⁹

Tacked on at the end of the New Zealand weather forecast, the Chatham Islands have garnered a poor reputation for their climate.³⁰ Rainfall is frequent, but at around 800 millimetres per annum, reasonably moderate in volume.³¹ Skies are frequently cloudy, with annual sunshine hours about half those of sunnier areas on the mainland. Temperatures do not exceed 24 degrees Celsius, but winters are mild. While nights are often crisp and clear, frosts are felt in only a few sheltered places. Hail is not unusual, but snow is extremely rare, and never lasts long. Apart from rain, high winds are

²⁵ Ibid., 91.

²⁶ Ibid., 18.

²⁷ Chatham Islands Economic Profile, 2014, 4.

²⁸ Alison Quentin-Baxter, “The Problems of Islands,” *Island Development and its Future* (Waitangi, Chatham Islands, 1995, 430-31, accessed November 4, 2018, https://www.victoria.ac.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/838764/Quentin-Baxter.pdf.

²⁹ Ibid., 431.

³⁰ King, 3.

³¹ Holmes, 87.

perhaps the most notorious weather feature. Lying in the path of the Roaring Forties, the group is subject to continuous gales sweeping the globe at that latitude.³² Bent and contorted landmark trees attest to the strength of prevailing south-west and north-west winds.³³ The Chatham Islands are by no means tropical, but at the same time, criticisms of a cold wet climate are not entirely deserved.

Climate had a considerable influence on Chatham Island experiences. In *Climate, Science, and Colonization: Histories from Australia and New Zealand*, James Beattie and others note that scholars have paid little attention to the connection between cultures and climate in settler societies.³⁴ This is a surprising omission, as climate is clearly “enframed in our lifestyles, our seasonality, our clothing and housing ... our aspirations and our tragedies”.³⁵ Weather phenomenon have been shown to provoke a variety of responses, which suggests a fruitful field for further historical analysis. By attending to these elements, we might better understand the diverse and complex ways that climates have been experienced, understood, and narrated.³⁶ I examine climate and environment through a vast range of human experience, because, as Ballantyne points out, while places are unique, so too is sense of place. Individuals moving through or taking root in a given location develop multiple relationships to place.³⁷ For those who made their home on Chatham Island, conditions remained virtually unchanged for many years. No roads were formed, no wharves were built, and contact with the wider world remained spasmodic and difficult. No large population centre ever developed, and civic amenities were hard won and slow to materialise. Not everyone enjoyed island life, let alone recognised any beauty in their surroundings. For many, the major drawback was the lack of roads and modern amenities, the perennial problem of dealing with and moving about in a difficult environment. So, while colonial histories of New Zealand focus on taming environment, developing infrastructure, and shaping community within supposedly new spaces, this pattern simply did not apply in the Chathams.

Change on the mainland came under the umbrella of progress, and the ability to come together to socialise and carry out business was considered the reward of human endeavour. As Rollo Arnold points out, while we take roads and bridges for granted

³² King, 3.

³³ Holmes, 87.

³⁴ Introduction to James Beattie, Matthew Henry, and Emily Gorman, eds., *Climate, Science, and Colonization: Histories from Australia and New Zealand* (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 3.

³⁵ James Roger Fleming, foreword in Beattie, *ibid.*, xi.

³⁶ Beattie et al., 3.

³⁷ Ballantyne, “On Space”, 59.

today, in nineteenth century New Zealand, “few subjects were more vehemently discussed” and “with good reason”.³⁸ Road boards existed from the 1850s, and local bodies became more effective from 1874, when central government began subsidising the building, maintenance, and networking of roads. Between 1870 and 1886, over 1500 miles of public railway were built. These “sinews” knitted the colony together “in firm patterns of interdependence”.³⁹ At the same time, the telegraph, post office, and newspapers became the “nerves”, networks carrying information and informing the colony about itself. Deficient nerves and sinews meant the Chatham Islanders felt disconnected from the colony, and even from themselves.

Mainland visitors and short-term residents were often highly critical of the Chathams’ lack of infrastructure and apparent stagnation. One wireless operator claimed Chatham Island deserved the reputation of “a lake surrounded by mud”, and as to the challenging conditions, wrote, “I was never so happy in my life when I said good-bye to them”.⁴⁰ Island residents grew increasingly sensitive to disparaging comments, and defensive and distrustful of outsiders. Tensions increased between those who went “onto” the island, and those who were “unto” the island.⁴¹ In time, this psychological barrier became more difficult to overcome than the stretch of ocean physically separating the islanders from mainland New Zealand.

Deficiencies in shipping clearly compounded the Chatham Islander’s sense of isolation from the outside world, but conditions hindering mobility within the island are less well known. I pay close attention to terrain, mobility, and communication, and the social and psychological effects of prolonged social atomisation within. Given impeded mobility, I am interested to learn the extent to which residents could initiate and share in cultural and community activities.

In terms of Chatham Islander identity, I show how this disparate group unified and assumed a self-conscious localism. In 1946, New Zealand’s Minister of Internal Affairs, William Parry, recommended the Chatham Islanders “be treated as an identifiable whole”. According to Parry, extensive intermarriage and other close ties

³⁸ Rollo Arnold, *New Zealand's Burning: The Settler's World in the Mid 1880's* (Wellington [N.Z.]: Victoria University Press, 1994), 219.

³⁹ 220

⁴⁰ “News of the Day”, *Auckland Star* (hereafter *AS*), 23 November 1932.

⁴¹ The term “unto” and “onto” are not specific to the Chathams. Landscape geographer Kenneth Olwig used “unto” an island to describe the sense of island-centricity felt by islanders when parted from that place. I use “onto” here as a means of expressing the outsider position, that of not being ‘unto’ the island.

meant the island community had developed in ways unparalleled in New Zealand.⁴² In 1949, a journalist claimed the Chatham Islanders wanted to be left alone, “to live as their ancestors had lived over the past century”.⁴³ In 1970, philosopher and social anthropologist, Fr. Gerald Arbuckle, described a society that had developed its own distinctive culture.⁴⁴ These views were cemented in 1990, when historian Michael King made his own case for Chatham Island exceptionalism. Life expectations, he claimed, were reconfigured by local limitations, and islanders had turned “in upon themselves”.⁴⁵ Citing a colourful and distinctive history, geographic remoteness, and the failure of successive governments to recognize island problems, he called this “a land apart”, where people proudly called themselves Chatham Islanders, and not New Zealanders.⁴⁶

Scholars in the field of island studies strive to overcome certain misconceptions, and principally, the binary oppositions of land and sea, island and mainland. The former highlights singularity, unique histories, and cultures, while the latter expounds on difference from the larger setting. Some claim these binaries cannot “do justice” to the “rich subject matter at hand”, and as a result, little attention is paid to island “ways of being, knowing, and doing”.⁴⁷ Adhering to binaries also submerges the complexities of liminality and hybridity.⁴⁸ From his time in the Chathams, King was well aware of these complexities and inner meanings. In 1986, he discovered a place where life had changed little in over 100 years, and which “retained a greater degree of psychic and historical residue than any other part of New Zealand”. The sense of timelessness, “the character of the landscape”, and a distinctive cultural climate stood out as markers of difference from mainland New Zealand.⁴⁹ This thesis takes up these themes and explores them in greater depth. With a particular focus on environment, it adopts a sensory approach, to better perceive and understand those less-tangible elements of this place, to shed further light on that “psychic residue”.⁵⁰

⁴² Parry is quoted in Colin George Dennison, “The Chatham Islands: A Study of Community and Economy in an Isolated Setting” (MA Thesis, University of Otago, 1966), iii. Dennison was given access to unpublished government reports, but I have been unable to locate these documents.

⁴³ “Life Down at the Chathams: Is Easy BUT Comfortless”, *Freelance*, 29 June 1949.

⁴⁴ Gerald A. Arbuckle, *The Chatham Islands in Perspective - a Socio-Economic Review* (Wellington: Hicks Smith, 1971), ix.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Michael King, *A Land Apart: The Chatham Islands of New Zealand* (Auckland: Random Century, 1990), 7.

⁴⁷ Elaine Stratford, Godfrey Baldacchino, Elizabeth McMahon, Carol Farbotko, and Andrew Harwood, “Envisioning the Archipelago,” *Island Studies Journal* 6, no. 2 (11, 2011): 113-114, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.otago.ac.nz/docview/1953325740?accountid=14700>.

⁴⁸ Lisa Fletcher, “... some distance to go”: A Critical Survey of Island Studies,” *New Literatures Review*, No. 47-48 (2011), 22.

⁴⁹ Preface to Michael King, *A Land Apart*.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

In this thesis, when I refer to the island, I am speaking of Chatham Island, whereas “islands” refers to the entire group. When speaking in generic terms of the permanent local community, I speak of those who identify as Chatham Islanders. These people descend, to varying degrees, from indigenous Moriori and a host of colonisers. By order of arrival, these were sealers and whalers of many nationalities, New Zealand Māori, German missionaries, and Pākehā settlers. These peoples share a sensational history, but I do not intend to re-render those events which captured the popular imagination, and dominated the telling of Chatham Island history. This includes those sensitive historic issues underlying present tensions. Neither do I detail the complex political relationship between the Chatham Islands and the New Zealand government, other than to consider some instances where official policy and islander attitudes strained this relationship, or caused material hardship. Instead, I focus on individual and environment, sensory engagement with place, and effects on life and lifestyles. To better understand the forces at play, I must enter the sensory realm.

Thinking in and through the senses

The primacy of the human senses has long captured the interest of scholars. In Western tradition, the Greek philosopher Aristotle (c. 384 B.C. to 322 B.C.) first demarcated the five primary senses we recognise today: sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell. Aristotle claimed humans could trust their senses to accurately represent the environment. He also stressed the efficacy of the combined senses, a coalescence that generated more meaningful interactions with environment. To explain how humans processed sensory information, Aristotle proposed a common sense, a synthesising agent that coordinated the messages received. At that time, common sense was assumed to reside in the heart, along with other mental functions.

English physician and philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) was constrained by the common opinion that humans have “but five senses”, but did allow, “perhaps there may be justly counted more”.⁵¹ He viewed the mind as a blank slate, “inscribed upon by the senses, which interpreted the outside world for each individual”.⁵² This outer experience, “the testimony” of sensation, provided a basic knowledge of the world.⁵³ As

⁵¹ J. Locke, *The Works of John Locke Esq: In Three Volumes. The Contents of Which Follow in the Next Leaf. With Alphabetical Tables*, Vol. 1, (John Churchill and Sam. Manship, 1714), 40, accessed November 5, 2018, <https://books.google.co.nz/>.

⁵² Jonathan Reinartz and Leonard Schwarz, “The Senses and the Enlightenment: An Introduction,” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35, no. 4 (2012): 466.

⁵³ Locke, 40.

the human mind processed sensations, this was experienced as reflection, and from reflection came “ideas”. One sense alone could form ideas, but multiple senses conveyed environmental messages more effectively.⁵⁴ According to Locke, reflection was responsible for two key human faculties, those of perception and volition, or thinking and willing. These capacities extended into remembrance, discernment, reasoning, judgment, choice, and faith, among others.⁵⁵

Some of the “ideas” discussed by Locke are better understood as emotions today. For instance, he highlights pleasure and pain, which is experienced in both a bodily and psychological sense. Through the senses then, we might experience feelings of delight, pleasure, and happiness in one moment, and uneasiness, torment, and misery in another.⁵⁶ French materialist physician and philosopher Julien de la Mettrie (1709-1751) went so far as to claim the senses were his “surest guides”, his personal “philosophers”.⁵⁷ La Mettrie argued, that because “man’s psychical life of thought and volition” arose from sensations, it stood to reason then, that without senses, there could be no ideas.⁵⁸ In other words, “were man only mind, he would know nothing”.⁵⁹

During the twentieth century scholars were generally unwilling to apply themselves to the “social life of the senses”.⁶⁰ Across the humanities and social sciences, sensory perception was regarded as too private and too fleeting to be captured in any useful way. Psychologists were entrusted with the illusive task of definition, yet today, they still acknowledge that this “can be tricky”.⁶¹ However, since the early 1990s, in the fields of sociology, anthropology, geography and history, the senses are being restored to their fundamental role, as mediators between mind and body, idea and object, self and society.⁶² The senses have been released from complex discourses of cognitive processes, or neurological mechanisms, and freed from the individual subject. As anthropologist David Howes exclaims, “the senses are everywhere ... supplanting older

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Annick Le Guérer, *Scent, the Mysterious and Essential Powers of Smell*, 1st U.S. ed (New York: Turtle Bay Books, 1992), 164.

⁵⁸ F. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. 6 (Tunbridge Wells, Kent: Burns & Oates, 1999), 47.

⁵⁹ Le Guérer, 164.

⁶⁰ David Howes, “The Social Life of the Senses,” *Ars Vivendi Journal*, no. 3 (2013): 4.

⁶¹ J. Krantz, *Experiencing Sensation and Perception* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2012), 1.6.

⁶² Michael Bull, Paul Gilroy, David Howes and Douglas Kahn, “Introducing Sensory Studies,” *The Senses and Society* 1, no. 1 (2006): 5.

paradigms of cultural interpretation, and challenging conventional theories of representation".⁶³

Historian Mark Smith is convinced that many areas of historical research and writing would benefit from a sensory infusion, and he commends the distinctly trans-disciplinary nature of the approach.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, there are obstacles to overcome. Unlike disciplines such as anthropology and geography, historians lack first-hand experience of the sensory lives of the people studied. They must rely on written accounts, visual images, and material artefacts. For more recent periods, interviews, film, and sound recordings prove more useful.⁶⁵ As in other lines of historical enquiry, evidence is often deeply embedded within archival sources, although Smith finds this "happily recoverable" through a "sensate habit". This is a specific way of attuning to sensory evidence buried in a range of texts. With experience, this becomes an ingrained process of analysis.⁶⁶ Others describe this as thinking *through* the senses.⁶⁷ Therefore, sensory history is less of, "a carefully delimited field of inquiry", and more, "a habit of thinking about the past, a technique used to investigate and understand".⁶⁸

Historians have taken a variety of approaches to the sensory. Some have focused on the histories of individual senses, and include biological understandings of the evolution of a particular sense.⁶⁹ According to historian Alain Corbin, in this purer form of sensory history, analysing written sources becomes an even greater conjectural skill, calling for careful value judgments.⁷⁰ Sensory or sensate history follows a similar path, but places considerable emphasis on social and cultural constructions, the role of the senses in structuring the past.⁷¹ However, both these approaches incorporate everyday sensory experiences, the average and the banal, and in doing so, acknowledge the sensory capacities of all. For this reason, sensory history includes those previously marginalised or excluded from history, on the basis of race, class, and gender.⁷² Again,

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Mark M. Smith, "Styling Sensory History," *Journal of Eighteenth Century Studies* 35, no. 4 (2012): 471.

⁶⁵ David Howes and Constance Classen, *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Senses in Society* (London, UK: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 12.

⁶⁶ Smith, "Styling Sensory History", 471.

⁶⁷ Bull et al., 5.

⁶⁸ Mark M. Smith, "Producing Sense, Consuming Sense, Making Sense: Perils and Prospects for Sensory History," *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 4 (2007): 842.

⁶⁹ Mark Smith, *Sensory History*, English ed. (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 5; "Preface: Styling Sensory History," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35, no. 4 (2012): 469.

⁷⁰ Alain Corbin, "Charting the Cultural History of the Senses," in *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*, ed. David Howes (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 134-35.

⁷¹ Smith, *Sensory History*, 5.

⁷² Katie Pickles, 262; Smith, "Preface: Styling Sensory History," 469.

Corbin advises caution, warning of the frequent silence of the banal. Few people wrote about themselves, and those who did were often socially restricted.⁷³ Smith acknowledges the value of detailed sense-specific scholarship, and recognizes the inherent challenges, but at the same time, welcomes a less restrictive approach. He commends a growing interest in multi-sensory analysis, as “arguably, the most innovative and exciting development in work on the history of the senses in recent years”.⁷⁴

Today, we understand the nervous system is responsible for processing sensory information, but our basic understanding of the senses, as inductors of information from the physical world to the realm of the mind (or even the heart), remains virtually unchanged. I do not engage here with the hierarchy of the senses, or provide biological definitions, neither am I overly concerned with how cultural interpretations of the senses changed over time. Instead, I embrace Howes’ notion that “the senses are everywhere”.⁷⁵ I adopt wider etymological meanings of “sense”, as advocated by anthropologist Jack Goody.⁷⁶ This gives license to broader interpretations; analysis is no longer limited to feelings experienced through the senses, but extends to “the range of sentiments surging within us”, including aesthetics and the appreciation of beauty. Goody views the senses as our windows on the world, and compares his line of enquiry to the concept of ‘mentalities’ employed by psychologically-minded historians. Even wider human characteristics come under the lens, such as sense of humour, sense of duty, justice, rhythm, colour, and so on. This method also encompasses the human capacity to understand, to make sense of, or to have common-sense. Therefore, Goody’s reading of the senses varies little from the philosophical concepts above.

Chatham Island histories

Like every other place, there are many histories of the Chatham Islands. No body of critical historical scholarship exists for the islands, nor is there any coordinated, comprehensive general history to refer to. In the early 1920s, Maude Seymour traced the “first connected historical account” of her birthplace, but her thesis contains no historical analysis. Seymour was diverted by “significant” aspects of island history,

⁷³ Corbin, 131-32; Reinartz and Schwarz, 466.

⁷⁴ Reinartz and Schwarz, *ibid.* Mark M. Smith, “Preface: Styling Sensory History,” *ibid.*: 469.

⁷⁵ Bull et al., 6.

⁷⁶ Jack Goody, “The Anthropology of the Senses and Sensations,” *La Ricerca Folklorica*, 45 (2002): 17.

because, in comparison, “the actual story of white settlement” seemed “to pale into insignificance”.⁷⁷ This focus has continued to this day.

The Chathams were sufficiently distant, and sufficiently uncomfortable to reach, to capture the popular imagination. Mainland visitors, writers, and journalists assumed some imperative to fill gaps in knowledge, and most did this in a particular way. They produced more romanticised accounts of events preoccupying Seymour, such as the “mystery” of Moriori occupation, the “tragedy” of their “displacement” by Māori, the “scandalous” *Jean Bart* incident, and the daring escape of Te Kooti Arikirangi. Deadly shipwrecks always feature. Visitors generally portrayed the islands as isolated, windswept, and inhospitable. The wild and stark landscape received similar treatment to that which fuelled Europe’s growing fascination for the “primitive” Scottish Highlands during the eighteenth century, including human aspects of brutality and misfortune.

Embellished with fashionable romanticism surrounding islands in general, writing is permeated by white, privileged, Anglo-Saxon attitudes of the era. For instance, in 1950, journalist and travel writer, Frank Simpson, lauded the first Pākehā settlers in the 1840s as the “Crusoes of Pitt Island”, and heralded the “dawn” of sheep farming as some welcome enlightenment.⁷⁸ These same themes were taken up by travel writer Rosaline Redwood in 1950, but unlike Simpson, she showed little interest in the contemporary Chatham Islander.⁷⁹ Although these remained the only readily available published texts on the Chathams for almost 40 years, only Simpson’s brief observations of island life have some use to this study.⁸⁰ Simpson’s self-assumed validity is also enlightening. He rails against the hastily formed outsider view, “outspoken criticism” based on visits of “ridiculously short duration”, yet, by his own admission he only spent a few days there.⁸¹ Small wonder the Chatham Islanders grew tired of “instant experts”.⁸²

Based on the success of *Moriori: A People Rediscovered* (1989) and *A Land Apart: The Chatham Islands of New Zealand* (1990), historian and biographer, Michael King, is

⁷⁷ Preface to Maud Ella Seymour, “A History of the Chatham Islands” (MA Thesis, University of New Zealand, 1924). <http://hdl.handle.net/10092/1628>. This is an insider account only to the extent she was informed by family who spent some years there. Seymour left the island with her family when she was about four years of age.

⁷⁸ Frank A. Simpson, *Chatham Exiles: Yesterday and Today at the Chatham Islands* (Wellington, N.Z.: Reed, 1950), 89. Simpson refers to Frederick Hunt and family.

⁷⁹ Rosaline Redwood, *Forgotten Islands of the South Pacific: The Story of New Zealand's Southern Islands* (Wellington: Reed, 1950). Rosaline Redwood was a pen name used by Marjory Staples.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁸¹ Simpson, 166, 70.

⁸² King, 8.

regarded as the principal authority on the Chatham Islands.⁸³ King was invited to write *Moriori* during the cultural renaissance of the 1980s, and this is still regarded as a seminal text. In *A Land Apart*, King continues his story of Moriori families, and presents a brief, broader history of the Chathams. This is a well-written, eye-catching general overview, rather than a comprehensive general history.⁸⁴ Academic historians have criticised King's work for its excessive narrative and lack of historical analysis, but Halie McCaffrey defends his narrative style as "simple and free from academic complication".⁸⁵ King unashamedly intended *A Land Apart* for a popular audience, and sources are only given for some larger block quotes. McCaffrey claims King omitted wieldy acknowledgements as a "device" to make the text more readable; the use of academic conventions might otherwise exclude the general reader.⁸⁶ However, King's attempts at anti-elitism effectively limit the academic use of his work, as the lack of referencing and bibliography makes it impossible to refer back to original sources. After wider reading, it is evident King made liberal use of the work of others, most notably Rhys Richards' 1962 thesis, "An Historical Geography of Chatham Island", and relied heavily on material written or supplied by David Holmes and Lyndsay Head. For this reason, wherever possible, I refer directly to these original works, to give those contributors the credit they deserve.

In fact, human geographers have paid greater scholarly attention to the Chathams, and their work offers valuable insights into island history. Rhys Richards' thesis is exacting and precise. It includes demographic trends, communications, trade, shipping and changing economies, but more importantly, Richards includes all island cultures, their lives and settlements.⁸⁷ By far the most comprehensive work to date, this has much to offer the historian. In 1966, geographer Colin Dennison took a different yet complementary approach in "The Chatham Islands: A Study of Community and Economy in an Isolated Setting". Dennison focuses on the island community between 1920 and 1966, and is chiefly interested in kinship, local institutions, religion, education, and islander mobility, topics of significance to this study.⁸⁸ Given the slow rate of change in

⁸³ *Moriori: A People Rediscovered* (Auckland: Viking, 1989); *A Land Apart: The Chatham Islands of New Zealand*. The latter was produced in conjunction with photographer Robin Morrison.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁸⁵ Halie McCaffrey, "'Like Iron Filings to a Magnet': A Reappraisal of Michael King's Approach to New Zealand History" (MA Thesis, Canterbury University, New Zealand, 2010), 77, 138, 39.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁸⁷ Rhys Richards, "An Historical Geography of Chatham Island" (MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, New Zealand, 1962).

⁸⁸ Colin George Dennison, "The Chatham Islands: A Study of Community and Economy in an Isolated Setting" (MA Thesis, University of Otago, 1966).

the islands, a fact borne out by this study, some results from Dennison's surveys in the 1960s are applicable to this project.

History is a very sensitive topic in this setting, and events of the past divide the Chatham Islanders. During a visit in 2007, I learned of divisions within the community, primarily caused by the renaissance of Moriori culture, and the contentious decisions of the Waitangi Tribunal in settling Moriori and Māori claims over land and access to resources. Treaty negotiations are ongoing, and during the research trip associated with this project in April - May 2016, I heard of even more factions. I went with the intention of carrying out up to ten oral interviews. Ideally, participants would have an interest in local and family history, and a willingness to share what it means to be a Chatham Islander. These interviews were expected to support and complement this study, and to add to the historical record.

I proposed an open-questioning technique, with general lines of enquiry aimed to elicit views on sense of identity, belonging, and difference from mainland New Zealand. The first question invited the participant to recall any reference by their forebears as to why they chose to identify as Chatham Islanders, rather than New Zealanders. Was there any particular event or set of circumstances that fostered that sense of detachment? And how might these feelings have been alleviated? Following on from this, I would ask what modern developments and conveniences islanders most desired or needed. Potentially, this would lead on to interpretations of hardship, resourcefulness, natural abundance, and resilience, in the past and in the present. Other enquiries were designed to further explore feelings of exceptionalism. By asking how the island community differed from small communities elsewhere in New Zealand, I hoped to learn, through first-hand accounts, how aspects of environment, isolation, and mobility determined the *modus operandi* of everyday life in specific ways. Finally, I would have asked about the advantages of living in the Chathams, and how and why these outweighed the disadvantages. I hoped I might hear about individual relationship with place, and go beyond the material, and into the realm of the aesthetic and sensory.

Aware of local reticence, I arranged these interviews through an island contact, who agreed to act as intermediary. These interviews did not take place for several reasons. Firstly, as I learned on arrival, my contact believed no one would agree to a formal interview without first becoming acquainted with the researcher. Several return visits were deemed necessary, although I had previously explained that resources were unlikely to accommodate this. Secondly, I was told, I was dealing with residual

resentment, because some islanders are unhappy with the way their history has been portrayed, and are wary of future renderings. Because Michael King's *Moriori: A People Rediscovered* was a commissioned work, some consider it biased, and believe their own people have been misrepresented, or even ignored.

Individuals would naturally prefer to see history written from their perspective. One unfortunate consequence arises. If a researcher is seen speaking with an individual from one faction, others might assume history is being examined from that person's viewpoint only. Ironically, in this way, silences are perpetuated by the silences encountered. Thirdly, Chatham Islanders as a whole, those who are "unto" the island, are highly sensitive to criticism from mainlanders, which seems to be regarded as inevitable. I was bluntly told, "that's why we don't like outsiders".⁸⁹ This mistrust, carried through the generations, was apparent to varying degrees, and I believe some were openly suspicious of my motives. Like others who have studied island communities, I discovered that being labelled an "outsider" is not a good thing.⁹⁰ This barrier is a real-life consequence for those who go "onto" an island.

Possibly, mistrust was also accentuated by my positionality relative to the research topic, and to the people within my study area. My family association with the Chathams came about through the cray fishing boom (1966-1969), and construction on behalf of a large mainland company, a major stakeholder in New Zealand's fishing industry. During the boom, the islands' rich fishery was plundered by an influx of outside fishermen, and at times, this uncontrolled exploitation brought disruption, tension, and violence. Although some islanders gained through employment at the time, benefits were uneven, and few locals prospered as a result. This era is not remembered with any great fondness in the Chathams.⁹¹

The lack of interviews does have negative consequences for this thesis. Few interviewees would have memories of the period covered, but in a study of place and identity, some access to "inner meanings" within the community, as discussed in chapter eight, would have been an advantage. This applies also to learning about first-hand sensory experiences and responses, and to hearing personal expressions of bonds with place.⁹² As a consequence, letters, diaries, and reminiscences have taken on greater importance, although this has also amplified imbalances in the record, particularly the

⁸⁹ "Anonymous", personal communication, 28 April 2016.

⁹⁰ Kenneth R. Olwig, "Are Islanders Insular? A Personal View," *Geographical Review* 97, no. 2 (2007): 56.

⁹¹ King, *A Land Apart: The Chatham Islands of New Zealand*, 8.

⁹² *Ibid*, 51.

lack of Māori and Moriori voices. For this reason, at times I have relied heavily on certain sources, perhaps more so than I might otherwise have done, and this has impacted on writing style.

The sources

When “articulating sensorial experiences”, sociologist Kelvin Low and others recommend “a more reflexive attitude towards one’s style of writing”.⁹³ Low encourages scholars toward more “sensuous writing”, to translate the individuals felt experiences in a meaningful and enriching way.⁹⁴ Sensory anthropologist David Howes resists any “structural model” that dictates “all cultural and personal experience and expression”.⁹⁵ In the same vein, anthropologist Paul Stoller reminds of Malinowski’s powerful writings in the 1920s. These featured many passages that aimed to “give the reader a sense of what it was like to live in the land of others”.⁹⁶ In approaching the sensory history of the Chatham Islands, these perspectives are a reminder to let the sources speak for themselves, and the reason behind the use of large block quotes at times.

Newspapers are the largest source of information about the Chathams, but unfortunately there are few local newspapers available. Several attempts were made to establish modest newspapers on the island, in 1867 and 1904, but neither survived more than a few months.⁹⁷ Many visitor accounts in mainland newspapers focus on lack of infrastructure, and newsworthy or contentious points of difference in how the Chatham Islanders go about their lives; these perceptions shaped the mainland view, perpetuating injustices still being addressed today.⁹⁸ Local correspondents are useful, but some excelled in extravagant praise or exaggeration, in colourful reports intended to

⁹³ Kelvin E.Y. Low, “The Social Life of the Senses: Charting Directions,” *Sociology Compass* 6, no. 3 (2012): 277.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Introduction to David Howes, *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*, ed. David Howes (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2005), 4.

⁹⁶ P. Stoller, *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 8.

⁹⁷ “The Public Debts Act”, *Lake Wakatip Mail*, 31 October 1867; “Nelson Evening Mail”, *Nelson Evening Mail*, 2 March 1904. These were the *Chatham Islands Chronicle*, produced by members of the military guard in 1867, and *Te Korero Pono*, the brainchild of Joseph Sigley. A tinsmith and plumber by trade, Sigley arrived about 1903, and spent some time on the island while his son Henry was head teacher at Te One School. Henry co-produced the monthly paper, but it ceased after a few months.

⁹⁸ Two cases in point are sustained claims that Moriori were an inferior, pre-Māori race driven from New Zealand to seek refuge in the Chatham Islands, views perpetuated in school journals for decades. This injustice was not officially recognised until 2011. Also, in the 1940s, there were damning reports of excessive drinking and immorality, although these were strongly refuted from many quarters.

promote closer settlement, or counter less palatable articles. However, some took a more balanced approach, and expressed the everyday lived realities of island life. Speaking of individual and community sentiment, and troubles and concerns of both the human and environmental kind, articles of this type are rich in sensory elements. Newspapers also contain descriptive and amusing accounts of travel about the island, nevertheless, more dispassionate observations are found in the writings of visiting clergy, surveyors, officials, and others there in professional or scientific capacities. Found in self-published forms, government reports, and scientific journals, these have proven valuable sensory and factual sources, and compensate for a lack of continuity in official recording.

Chatham Islanders have shared their histories and life stories in various forms. David Holmes (1906-2001) is acknowledged as the foremost local historian, and for almost 75 years, writers and researchers called upon his extensive knowledge. In 1993, Holmes published *My Seventy Years in the Chathams, Reminiscences by David Holmes*, but never intended this as a comprehensive or co-ordinated history.⁹⁹ Holmes seasons dry fact with anecdote, and in the same way as Te Miria Kate Wills Johnson, uses stories to express shared values of accountability, co-operation, hospitality, and sense of fairness and justice.¹⁰⁰ In *The People of the Chathams: True Tales of the Islanders' Early Days*, Wills Johnson relies entirely on anecdote to immortalise and celebrate islander "foibles, wisdom, and unusual characteristics".¹⁰¹ Both writers reflect core themes of fortitude, clannishness, and sense of humour. Overall, Holmes depicts a self-sufficient community, where nothing can truly bother such resourceful and stoic people. By projecting an image of self-containment, he falls into the trap mentioned by Ballantyne, and his generalisations are fundamentally flawed.¹⁰² Although bounded by sea, the Chathams are far from "seamless" and independent. As this thesis shows, the flow of "money, things and news" was as vital to the Chatham Islanders as any other colonists, perhaps even more so than their mainland counterparts.¹⁰³

Pioneering or backblocks fortitude is further eulogized in *Forget-Them-Not Our Past: Women of the Chatham Islands*, published in 1993. The stories of seven notable island women tell of the strengths and qualities required to live and survive in this

⁹⁹ David Holmes, *My 70 Years on the Chatham Islands* (Christchurch N.Z.: Shoal Bay Press, 1993).

¹⁰⁰ Te Miria Kate Wills Johnson, *The People of the Chathams: True Tales of the Islanders' Early Days*, Limited ed. (Martinborough, N.Z.: GWJ Publications, 1994).

¹⁰¹ Rhys Richards, editorial note in Holmes, *My Seventy Years*, 9.

¹⁰² See Chapter 1, page 24.

¹⁰³ Ballantyne, "On Place", 61.

“man’s paradise”.¹⁰⁴ This term alludes to the comparative hardships of women, but this book leaves large silences about less positive aspects of women’s lives. The voice of Moriori, Māori, and working-class women are all but absent from published and archival sources. Only the letters and diaries of Pākehā women, those claiming more genteel attributes, provide a window on women’s lives. More forthright accounts of lived and felt experiences are found in autobiographies and memoirs, both published and archival. Letters and diaries add authenticity, and the extensive diaries of settler Edward Chudleigh rate a special mention. The son of a Cornish clergyman, he farmed Wharekauri Station for over 40 years. With influential friends in Canterbury, he was the island’s self-proclaimed leader. Atypical in this setting, Chudleigh was terse, morose, and moralistic, and his judgemental attitude distanced him from the community. However, for all this, he was a great benefactor, whose very distance makes his observations and opinions all the more reliable. His blunt and unflattering diary entries are very much a realist’s interpretation.

Chapters and thesis structure

The first two chapters situate the Chatham Islanders, establishing their place on both watery and earthly foundations, and setting the scene for those that follow. Chapter One, titled “Coast, Beaches and Shores”, reimagines island boundaries and dissolves notions of coast as the edge of land and sea. It does this by taking a more expansive view of the Chatham Islanders’ environment, to consider them as part of a “terraqueous” whole. Meaning “formed of land and water”, this concept shaped early modern understandings of the globe. However, the term signified much more than delineated areas of land and sea, and encompassed connecting and transforming matter, such as atmospheres, vapours, airs, and waters. Historian Alison Bashford invites scholars to reconsider this concept, to rethink meeting places of land, sea, and sky, as fusions of volatile elements. I adopt this approach, in order to explore relationships between people, climate, and ships in and around the Chatham Islands.¹⁰⁵

This chapter speaks of permeability, vulnerability, and exchange. It takes account of material exchanges, such as people and objects converging on Chatham shores, in the

¹⁰⁴ Julianne Hayes-Smith, ed. *Forget-Them-Not Our Past: Women of the Chatham Islands: Mahine, Wahine, Frau* (Glentaniki, N.Z.: Karen McMillan, 1994). Rhys Richards often heard the Chathams described as a “man’s world” or “man’s playground”, as has the author. Michael King also noted it was very much a man’s island.

¹⁰⁵ Alison Bashford, “Terraqueous Histories,” *The Historical Journal* 60, no. 2 (2017): 3.

conventional sense, while also considering those natural, less-definable encounters, experienced through fusions of airs, atmospheres, vapours, tides and currents. When considered within a terraqueous context, the Chathams effectively take their place within a wider Pacific environment. At the same time, islanders lives are seen as part of a larger story.

This approach reveals Chatham Island as anything but neatly bounded and insulated, and the people likewise. It also speaks of encroaching enemies, the physical devastation of tsunamis, and the incursion of wind-blown sand, with associated effects on lives and livelihoods. Terraqueous thinking provides meaningful sensory insights into the lives of fisherfolk and mariners, and shows how the term “coastal dweller” might be applied to all Chatham Islanders.¹⁰⁶

Chapter Two, titled “Terra (In)firma: Mobility on Chatham Island”, focuses on defining natural elements such as terrain, weather, and climate. It argues that the perennial difficulties of moving from place to place on Chatham Island were the root cause of implied “arrested development”. Travel experiences go some way to explaining why no roads were formed until 1947, and why islanders continued to live in isolated pockets, with limited social contact for extended periods of time. As residents seldom wrote about island journeys, visitor accounts are often relied on to paint a picture of elements impeding mobility. Visitors are also more likely to comment on modes of transport, and local innovations to meet specific needs.

This chapter also addresses how impeded mobility and social atomisation affected the individual and collective psyche, most notably the widespread lethargy and depression experienced during winter months. Local newspaper correspondents, and the writings of Edward Chudleigh, are useful sources. It also establishes how physical inertia impacted on potential for social and economic advancement, and how this in turn drew outsider attention to lack of infrastructure, in ways reflecting negatively on island society. In the face of disparaging comments, islanders turned “in upon themselves”, and because of assumed difference, regarded themselves as a separate people.¹⁰⁷ However, as I argue, that difference also stemmed from the island environment, and not just the negative perceptions of outsiders.

Based on the geographical concept of time-space compression, Chapter Three advances themes of mobility, transport, and modernity. Titled “Place, Space, and Time”,

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 10.

¹⁰⁷ King, *A Land Apart: The Chatham Islands of New Zealand*, 7.

it draws on literature of place and place-making from a range of disciplines, to show how Chatham Island was inscribed with meaning. Highlighting positive encounters with environment, it introduces more abstract ideas, which are further developed in later chapters. While efficient transport was regarded as paramount in progressive societies, without wheeled, faster, and more enclosed forms of transport, travel on Chatham Island was more akin to mobility in pre-industrial times.

Not all outsiders were critical of the island's slower pace of life, and visitors and newcomers often appreciated being free of time restraints, the pressure of modern urban living. Islanders always moved at this pace, so perhaps they were less aware of their uninterrupted sensory engagement with environment. This chapter considers both perspectives, to argue that a pedestrian pace allowed island travellers to attune to nature more fully. Moving through a supposedly drab environment, devoid of what Western aesthetics perceived as agreeable features, newcomers were surprised by sudden visions of colour, texture, light, and form. These revelations brought new understandings of beauty, and overcame preconceived notions of idealised landscapes. Conversely, islanders who ventured abroad were often glad to return to a slower pace of life, especially after a sensory overload of the artificial kind.

Enlarging on the "terraqueous", Chapter Four reveals the "glorious state of uncertainty" dominating the islanders' relationship with the sea. Titled "Travelling the Sea Roads", it takes account of winds, waves, tides, and ocean currents, to show how these affected travel to and from the islands, and when moving about in coastal waters. The sea is revealed as both a dividing and linking element, a hazardous and often frightening feature of mobility and communication. While this chapter provides some details of the island's shipping history, it is more concerned with the sensory experiences of waterborne transport.

By describing the region's geographical features, and environmental drivers such as tides, waves, and ocean currents, this chapter explains why transitional spaces were often experienced as hostile. It also highlights islander's dependence on 'sea roads' in coastal waters, for the movement of people, supplies, and exports, and why these proved an unsafe alternative to overland travel. Primary sources provide a fund of sensory material to reveal the hazards and unpleasantness, and to explain why conditions discouraged regular encounters with the sea.

Islander interactions with the wider world through mail, newspapers, wireless, and radio broadcasting are explored in Chapter Five, "Communication, Place and

Identity". It firstly highlights the importance of mail, to expose the peoples' overwhelming desire for newer news. When communication depended entirely on shipping, they often expressed feelings of isolation and social deprivation, and this chapter shows how time weighed heavily between shipping calls, until 1913, when wireless telegraphy became available.

Using a range of communication theory, I consider the positive effects of modern technologies on the daily lives of Chatham Islanders. Primary sources reveal the social and psychological benefits of wireless communication with New Zealand, and the impact of basic telephone services on the island, especially during wartime. The advent of radio broadcasting in the 1920s brought exciting new auditory experiences, which not only entertained, but also enriching lives, and I argue, improving island sociability. Radio induced a greater sense of belonging to New Zealand, while its immediacy also created more meaningful associations with the wider world; in doing so, radio helped to alleviate the islanders' sense of isolation.

Chapters Six and Seven extend themes of community and sociability, by exploring key aspects of island life which brought people together to enjoy one another's company. In Chapter Six, titled "Food, hospitality, and sociability", again, ships are to the fore. Highlighting the sights and sounds of "boat day", without doubt the most important gathering on the island, it tells of the socialising that took place on those few days of the year when a ship was in port. Between times, there were many days of routine and quietude, especially in outlying areas, and boredom was gratefully relieved by the arrival of visitors. A warm reception at the end of a long and arduous journey was greatly appreciated. Hospitality is shown here as a basic tenet of island life, an important practice in building community.

Naturally, the sharing of food was an important aspect of hospitality, and the remainder of this chapter focuses on food resources, and their relevance throughout the island's history. Although natural abundance is a defining feature of the islands, their food story is one of adaptation. Islanders also relied heavily on potatoes, and the success of these and all other crops depended entirely on the weather. Every household must be self-sufficient, and food gathering practices were built into the way of life. Yet, as this chapter shows, hunting and fishing went beyond bodily sustenance. This was also a vital leisure, sporting, and social activity for island men, and for this reason, much of this chapter has a masculine focus. It then moves from social food gathering to social

consumption, before showing, that even in the face of natural abundance, islanders craved the delights of rare food treats arriving from the mainland.

Chapter Seven places greater emphasis on the processes of building community, and shifts the focus to women's lives. Titled "Health, well-being, and care", it shows how community life developed, regardless of disunity, inadequate resources, and the relative absence of infrastructure. However, as this chapter reveals, people were often preoccupied with more important goals, such as staying alive, and attending to well-being in general. This chapter examines the rigours and heartbreak of gaining access to medical treatment and health care, to show, that above all else, matters of life and death were perhaps the strongest uniting forces within this community.

The doctor's life on Chatham Island was far from comfortable, and islanders were often without professional medical care. Both women and men stepped into caring roles, and delivered this in numerous ways. Women relied on one another as midwives and nurses, but this chapter delves further into women's lives, to uncover the realities of gendered expectations and demands, of poor mobility, isolation, and exclusion. To overcome large silences in the record, I offer some new perspectives, by examining the horse as an agent of freedom for women. Psychologists engaged in equine facilitated counselling have discovered how women can gain a sense of empowerment through close bonds with a horse. I examine the practical benefits of women's ability to ride, while considering the more therapeutic advantages of mobility as a strategic form of self-care.¹⁰⁸

The final chapter, titled "Insularity, Identity and Psyche", returns to conceptions of the Chatham Islands as a land apart. Relationship with New Zealand was not a focus of this thesis, but clearly, as shown throughout, living 500 miles from the centre of power had considerable impacts on island lives. While islanders were adept at managing life's challenges, there were periods when people felt "left out in the cold" by government. This, along with prolonged independence and self-sufficiency, reinforced islander's insularity. Based on the geographical principal of distance decay, this chapter reveals growing indifference and resentment on both sides of the Chatham Rise, and exposes the more negative face of island culture, as described by King.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ See Hillary Sharpe, "Equine-Facilitated Counselling and Women with Eating Disorders: Articulating Bodily Experiences", *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy* 48, no. 2 (2017): 127-52, and Hillary Sharpe and Tom Strong in *Embodied Relating and Transformation: Tales from Equine-Facilitated Counseling* (Sense Publishers, 2015).

¹⁰⁹ King, *A Land Apart*, 8.

This chapter relies on theories of “rootedness” and “islandness”, to explain the islanders’ unreflective state. By focusing on certain times and events, it reveals how “insider” and “outsider” relationships were affected in ways which seldom helped the islanders’ cause. Using the rise and fall of the fishing village of Owenga as something of a case study, it highlights the material realities of surviving in the fishing industry, given the vagaries of weather and climate, and complications of a cash economy. Although portrayed as a land of plenty, this last chapter shows that hardship did exist in the Chatham Islands. Yet, in spite of perceived differences, insider/outsider boundaries are more malleable than they first appear.

In this place of wind and shifting sands, people played their part in reshaping environment. This makes Chatham Island a ripe field for the environmental historian, but this is not an environmental history, instead, this thesis focuses on the relationship between the Chatham Islanders and the peculiar characteristics of this place. Based on the premise that people shape places and places shape people, it shows how they came to understand this environment, by relying on the senses to interpret their surroundings and limitations. With this knowledge, people learned to live both in and with this place, to form community, and to develop the unique identity of the Chatham Islander.

Chapter 1: Coasts, Beaches and Shore

Chatham Island is likened in shape to a Māori anchor-stone, narrow in the middle and broad at either end. The largest of 15 islands within a 25-mile radius, it covers an area of 355 square miles.¹ No part is more than ten miles from the sea, therefore geographically, it may be regarded as both island and shore. The surrounding ocean dominates the climate, and conditions are subject to rapid change. In 1971, human geographer Rhys Richards described the Chathams as, “a few small specks of land isolated near the centre of the water hemisphere, that seldom appreciated half of the world where the southern oceans are interrupted only by the two island continents of Antarctica and Australia”.² It can certainly feel this way, however, here I argue that the concept of the “terraqueous whole” offers new ways to reconceptualise Chatham Island and its environs. Fusing elements of atmosphere, island, sea, shore, and ship, this chapter considers the region as a “terraqueous whole”.³ Foregrounding permeability, this approach breaks down distinctions between earth and ocean, and considers the region as a volatile and all-encompassing environment. Reimagining this place as a fusion of natural elements, the sum of many parts, dissolves that sense of isolation and remoteness, and land and sea are effectively rendered as cohabitants of the vast Pacific Ocean.

This approach is useful in challenging preconceptions of islands as contained and bounded spaces. As Tony Ballantyne reminds us, even in nation-based histories, to view distinctive localities as fixed, stable, and enclosed is to impoverish past lives.⁴ According to John Gillis, western society has struggled “to regard place as anything but terrestrial”, and coasts too have remained a relatively “unmarked category” in both history and geography.⁵ The ocean became a metaphor for chaos and confusion, and the basis of the popular idiom “all at sea” was used to describe a human state of indecision and uncertainty.⁶ Gillis contends, that if “water stands for chaos and land for order”, then islands are “a third kind of place, partaking of both earth and water, something betwixt

¹ This equates to over 227000 acres.

² Rhys Richards, *American Whaling on the Chathams Grounds: Viewed from an Antipodean Perspective*, ed. Association Nantucket Historical (Nantucket, Mass.: Nantucket Historical Association, 1971), 5.

³ Alison Bashford, “Terraqueous Histories,” *The Historical Journal* 60, no. 2 (2017): 8.

⁴ Tony Ballantyne, “On Place, Space and Mobility in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand,” *New Zealand Journal of History* 45, no. 1 (2011): 59.

⁵ John R. Gillis, *The Human Shore: Seacoasts in History* (University of Chicago Press, 2012), 7, 8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, *Islands of the Mind: How the Human Imagination Created the Atlantic World*, 1 ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 2.

and between”.⁷ The concept of the terraqueous breaks down these preconceived boundaries.

Alison Bashford notes renewed interest in the relationship between humans and climates in the past. She argues for an approach that takes account of both land and sea, and “the transforming matter that constantly connected them: atmospheres, vapours, airs, and waters”, to reflect the Earth as a “terraqeous whole”.⁸ In revisiting this early modern concept, Bashford sees the potential to neatly foreground “the meeting of land and sea that has engaged so many historians of different periods and places, substantively, symbolically, and epistemologically: coastlines, beaches, islands, ships”.⁹ Terraqueous thinking also offers new ways of conceptualizing the lives of coast-dwellers, fisherfolk, and mariners.¹⁰

As neither land nor sea, the beach is a quintessentially liminal space, sometimes a place of beauty and possibility, at others a site of incursion and fear.¹¹ The beach is a site where histories and cultures meet, “where different conceptions of time abruptly came up against one another”.¹² Yet, as Bashford points out, historiography has failed to recognize how the beach functions as a floating or “alternative state”. Given the “contested territorial character” of these zones, and their role in colonial and post-colonial histories, Bashford believes the beach might be better understood when reimagined and historicized as a terraqueous meeting place.

She reminds us too that the history of ships and beaches are closely connected, and that ocean-going vessels have often been evaluated as “floating islands” or “floating states”. Therefore, she argues, if coastlines, islands, and ships constitute different forms of terraqueous meeting sites, there are situations where these might be analysed as one assemblage.¹³ By investigating how people were influenced by sea, shore, and beach, this chapter reimagines lives within this terraqueous environment, to argue, that physically and psychologically, the Chatham Islanders were far from neatly bounded, or insulated in relation to their environment. On this small, low-lying island, open to natural forces, people sometimes felt vulnerable, like mariners on the sea, therefore, the

⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁸ Bashford, 8, 19.

⁹ Ibid., 3, 8.

¹⁰ Ibid., 10.

¹¹ Robert Preston-Whyte, “The Beach as a Liminal Space,” in *A Companion to Tourism*, ed. Alan A. Lew, Colin Michael Hall, and Allan M. Williams (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 349.

¹² Bashford, 12.

¹³ Ibid., 11, 12.

islanders themselves might be regarded as terraqueous beings, shaped by land and water.

Climate and weather

The region of the Chatham Islands might fittingly be described as a maelstrom of atmospheres, vapours, airs, and waters. Although over 800km distant, the islands share the atmospheric circulation patterns characteristic of New Zealand, and broad climatic features influence day-to-day weather. As Chatham Island is relatively small, almost half the size of Stewart Island, it is fair to say these isolated islands in the Southwest Pacific Ocean “stand alone” as regards weather.¹⁴ Wind is a marked feature of daily life, and there are few calm days.¹⁵ South to southwest airstreams predominate; these are accompanied by cool, showery weather, and cloudy skies. Occurring about 35 percent of the time, these last from three to ten days, and strong to gale force winds are common.¹⁶ During spring and summer, north to northwest airstreams cover the islands around 30 percent of the time. These bring mainly fine, sunny conditions, but wind is always present, interspersed with frequent and rapidly moving cold fronts with showers.¹⁷ Another 15 percent of the time, north to northeast flows are present; with this airflow, conditions are often mild and humid, but intensive, heavy rains are also likely, often for days on end.¹⁸ An east to southeast airstream is more likely to bring fine weather, although cloud and drizzle are also commonplace.¹⁹

Rain is frequent in the Chathams, and falls mostly as light showers or drizzle. Heavy rainfalls are “rather exceptional”. The number of rain days (of at least 0.1 mm) is relatively high; on average, 225 days a year are recorded at Waitangi, compared with 120 days in Christchurch, and 183 days for Auckland. Wet days (1.0 mm or more) are experienced 134 days of the year. Rainfall is generally higher on the southern plateau, and lower in the north and northeast. Dry spells also occur, and 108 periods of no measurable rain (for 14 days or more) have been recorded since 1878.²⁰ Temperature is the most stable aspect of the climate, less affected by extremes, and this is directly

¹⁴ Craig S. Thompson, *The Weather and Climate of the Chatham Islands*, ed. New Zealand Meteorological Service (Wellington, N.Z.: New Zealand Meteorological Service, 1983), 4. The New Zealand territory of Stewart Island lies 30 kilometres to the south of the South Island.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4. Westerly winds prevail over the southern oceans of the world. The mean wind speed in the Chathams is 14 knots. By comparison, in Dunedin it is seven knots.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8, 17.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

attributable to the surrounding sea.²¹ As meteorologist Craig Thompson explains, “the temperature regimes of small islands are influenced by the prevailing wind flows, with their associated airmass characteristics, and hence by the surrounding surface face temperatures”. Daily and annual temperature variations are small. Temperatures usually reach 17 to 18 degrees in summer, and seldom fall below 5 degrees in winter.²² Cloud cover averages 74 percent, with skies overcast 38 percent of the time.²³ Sunless days are recorded for 40 to 50 days per annum.²⁴ Fog is experienced throughout the year, and can be persistent; this is predominantly sea fog, which forms when a warm, humid northerly air mass is cooled by a colder sea. However, these are not as frequent as the name Rēkohu might imply. In most years less than 30 days of fog are recorded.²⁵

The influence of wind and sea literally penetrates the daily lives of the Chatham Islanders. In 1904, Joseph Sigley eloquently expressed this sense of scale and effect, and demonstrates the islanders were anything but impervious to the influence of the oceanic climate:

The fresh sweet air of the encircling seas tending to health ... the breezes are usually gentle; still, sometimes the wind gets it bark up and then things are on the move. Today may be quiet with hardly a ripple on the water, and the zephyrs that fan the cheek just delightful, but tomorrow, a veritable house shaker may sweep over the island, howling and raging as tho’ all the doughty folk from the fabled underworld of the ancients were let loose in the regions of the air and were dead anxious to get from water to water in as short a time as possible.²⁶

Torrential rain may be a rare occurrence, but those encountering these conditions found it memorable. In 1874, the Reverend Croasdaile Bowen experienced the full effects of “a wet bout”. “The rain fell in sheets rather than torrents”, he wrote, “more like a tropical downfall than anything I have seen in New Zealand”.²⁷ Lasting almost a week, he was forced to curtail his travel plans. Reginald McGregor, a shepherd on Kaingaroa Station in

²¹ Ibid., 20.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 21., and A. C. S. Wright, *Soils of Chatham Island (Rekohu)*, ed. New Zealand Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, and New Zealand Soil Bureau (Wellington, N.Z.: Dept. of Scientific and Industrial Research, 1959), 20.

²⁴ Thompson, 22.

²⁵ Ibid, 20.

²⁶ Joseph Robert Sigley, c. 1904, “Some Impressions of Chatham Island”, Ref. Z.Ms SIG, Christchurch City Libraries Archive, Christchurch. (Hereafter CCLA).

²⁷ Reverend Croasdaile Bowen, *Account of a visit to the Chatham Islands, 1874*, Pattison, Hoel Thornthwaite, Papers, MS-Papers-9665-2, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington. (Hereafter ATL).

the early twentieth century, described life in the open, and its effects on working life for man and beast.

The Chatham Island weather can be reasonable at times, but in the winter months, to say the least, it's miserable, wet and cold (not frost and snow), but with a piercing wind, where a horse would stick his back into the wind and rain and refuse to budge. The strength of the wind to gale force, straight from the Antarctic, seems to chill you to the bone with the freezing rain. Never even in Gallipoli, at the time of the blizzard in 1915, or in France when the ground was frozen solid have I found the cold as bad as the Chatham Islands, meaning being caught out in the open on horseback.

I have tipped the water out of my boots, wrung my socks out, and pulled my wet socks on, not wet in a pool, puddle or creek, but just rain, oil-skin, sou'wester and oil skin leggings over high gumboots, but with the wind, soaked to the skin. That's if you're unlucky to be caught out on the clears. South-west heavy squalls pass over for three or four days on end, about every hour the sun would peep out, and here is another beauty coming, speak to your horse, and pressure your heels, and full speed for a clump of bush or gully out of the wind, and if you get caught out in the evening, and some miles to go, well, all you could do was to leave everything to your horse, to pick his own way back through the bog ... they are just as anxious to get out of the elements as the rider.

And as for darkness, well death cannot be darker. I have waved my hand in front of my face at 2" and seen nothing, as if you were struck with blindness. I am not exaggerating this one bit.²⁸

On Chatham Island, the intensity of winds accentuated the effects of other weather components, making conditions all-the-more extreme and dramatic. The winter of 1907 brought plenty of rain and wind. As a local correspondent explained, "the sou-wester is a particularly nasty customer", blowing for up to a week with barely a lull, and on occasion bringing squalls of hail that were "first cousins to a blizzard". Given the keenness of the wind, the writer thought "icebergs cannot be very far south of us ... they are sometimes seen off the coast".²⁹ In fact, icebergs were reported only once, in late 1892. Seventeen-year-old Caroline Gascoyne found them "strange and fascinating ... vast islands of glittering ice".³⁰ Their appearance ranked as an impressive event in an otherwise quiet life (Figure 1).³¹ As these "snowy-white mountains of vast size floated

²⁸ Reginald McGregor, Henry Odman, *Reminiscences, "Life on the Chatham Islands between the years 1903-1942"*, Folder 741, ARC c.1900 360, Canterbury Museum, Christchurch.

²⁹ "Chatham Islands", *Wairarapa Age* (hereafter WA), 19 October 1907.

³⁰ Constance Miller, fl 1992, *History of the Gascoyne Family*, MS-Papers-4549, ATL.

³¹ Miller; "Cause of the Cold Weather", *Taranaki Herald* (hereafter TH), 14 January 1893.

slowly round the islands”, one stranded and broke up in shallow water on the east coast. Such was the novelty, Mrs Papen of Whangaroa despatched a boat to collect some ice to make a pot of tea, proudly made with water from Antarctica.³² Some believed this rare phenomenon was responsible for the exceptionally cold temperatures that preceded their visitation.³³

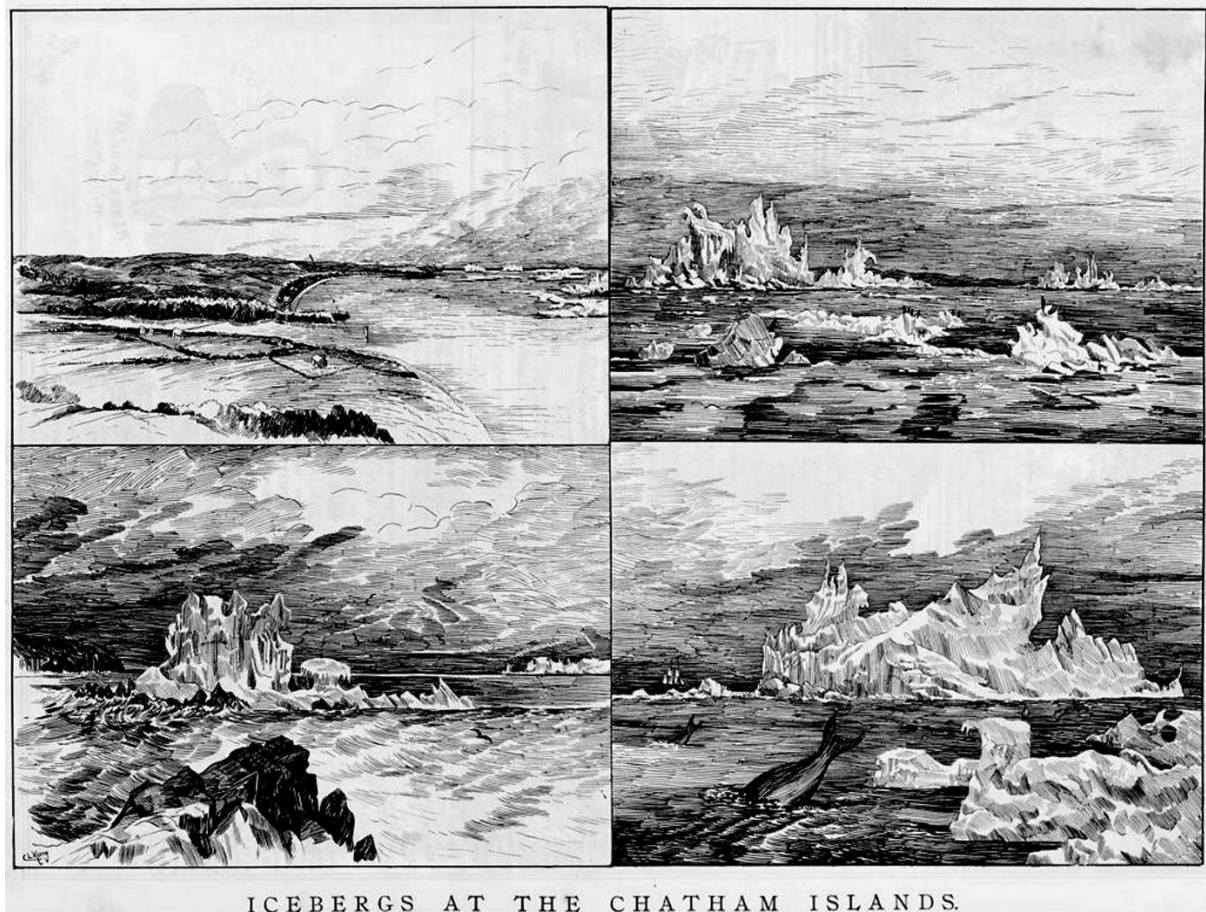


Figure 1: New Zealand Graphic, 28 January 1893. Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, NZG-18930128-83-1. <http://www.aucklandcity.govt.nz/>.

Evidence shows the islander’s weather consciousness was not bounded by the shore but extended well out to sea. As surveyor John Robertson observed in 1882, people were generally “weather-wise”, as their interests depended “a great deal on the state of the winds and weather”, reflected in the fact that after any initial greeting, the next remark

³² David Holmes, “Flotsam and Jetsam on the Shores of Chatham Island”, in MS-Papers-1681, Holmes, David, Chatham Island Papers, ATL.

³³ “Cause of the Cold Weather”.

usually referred to the wind and weather.³⁴ McGregor, the man of the land, was fully conversant with wind directions and their effects. His observations were based on personal experience, and his weather knowledge and concerns encompassed sea conditions, and how these might affect ships in the area. He wrote:

The South West wind when moderate is drying, E and NE, foggy and damp, SE bright but generally brings up a heavy sea, N and NW, showery, and westerly, fairly moderate, but generally heavy low cloud hangs over the Chathams, an anxious time for shipping to pick up the land. Mariners Quick, great care is needed, many reefs and shoals and heavy surf.³⁵

Shore and beach: Open for trade

Dangerous as these coastal waters are, this proved no disincentive to exploitation and trade. Shore and beach often provoke ideas of openness and exchange, a site of possibility, but for indigenous Moriori, the early years of the nineteenth century brought violence and change to Rēkohu. Sealers and bay whalers reputedly formed “elements of a society in which neither law nor morality was much respected”.³⁶ Many were shipwrecked or deserted sailors, or escaped convicts from Sydney and Hobart. Many commentators emphasise the “evils and drunkenness” of this era, but Richards considers more positive consequences from this influx of men. In this instance, the shore may be regarded as “a borderland that allows both difference and hybridity”.³⁷ On the beach new communities arose. As Richards notes, the breadth of origins of the present-day Chatham Islander stems from those who chose to remain, “to establish enduring farms and families”.³⁸ The typical islander is of both Polynesian and Pākehā ancestry, but the range of origins is evident from an 1867 census of 150 “foreign” inhabitants. In addition to Moriori and New Zealand Māori, the population also includes German, Danish, English, Irish, Welsh, Scots, Laplander, Russian, Finn, Spanish, Portuguese, African American, Native American, Chinese, Filipino, Australian aboriginal, and other Polynesian and Melanesian heritage.

³⁴ John A. Robertson, “Chatham Islands,” in *Proceedings and Transactions of the Queensland Branch of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, Queensland* (Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, Queensland, 1889), 89.

³⁵ McGregor, 12.

³⁶ “The Chatham Islands”, *Nelson Examiner and New Zealand Chronicle*, 29 March 1866.

³⁷ Preston-Whyte, 349.

³⁸ Richards, 55.

Sea-oriented, or pelagic whalers developed a mutually beneficial relationship with the Chatham Islanders.³⁹ From the early 1840s, New England and Sydney based whalers exploiting these waters, and Māori engaged in profitable trade with visiting ships. Later, traders from Australia and New Zealand began to call. Some Pākehā engaged in trade, but until 1860, this was almost solely in the hands of Māori.⁴⁰ Potatoes were the mainstay, but over time, Māori diversified into wheat, taro, swedes, maize, and pumpkins.⁴¹ In earlier years, produce was exchanged for cotton cloth, tools, and trinkets, but as time went on, rum, tobacco, sugar, and other luxury items were preferred. From the late 1840s, sheep and cattle were requested in exchange for produce, and horses were keenly sought after. Australian traders brought fine animals, many reputedly stolen from Sydney.⁴²

Trade became erratic throughout the 1860s, and at times, extensive crops were raised, but no vessel would call.⁴³ This left tons of potatoes rotting on the ground.⁴⁴ Pigs were also raised, but trade in livestock proved precarious. Robertson learned of one occasion when a sailing vessel left for New Zealand with a full cargo of cattle and horses, and six weeks later, “turned up again and landed what was left – a few miserable horses and bullocks”. The ship was driven well off course to the south-east, and the remainder of the cargo had perished.⁴⁵ By the mid-1860s, Māori were growing disillusioned with trade, and the limitations of island life in general. Many wished to return to Taranaki to secure previously confiscated land.⁴⁶ According to Captain Thomas, the Resident Magistrate (RM), they also “wished to enjoy the advantages which a more civilized district would afford”.⁴⁷

Coastal waters in the Chathams teemed with fish, but during the nineteenth century, the sea’s bounty was not considered as an alternative source of income. An irrational fear of sharks kept Pākehā from the ocean. Robert Lyne, a young relative of island farmer Edward Chudleigh, worked on Wharekauri Station during the 1880s. He

³⁹ Ibid., 51.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 53.

⁴¹ Ibid., 5-6, 51, 53.

⁴² David Holmes, “Potatoes and Potato Growing on Chatham Islands”, in MS-Papers-1681, Holmes, David, Chatham Island Papers, ATL.

⁴³ Eileen L. Elliott, “Chatham Island: A Study in Arrested Development,” *New Zealand Geographer* 12, no. 2 (1956): 156.

⁴⁴ “The Chatham Islands”, *ibid.* David Holmes was told of substantial plantings at Waitangi, Tupuangi, Wharekauri, Kaingaroa, and Okawa.

⁴⁵ Robertson, 83.

⁴⁶ “Chatham Islands Review Team Report, April 1986”: A Report to the Minister of Internal Affairs, (Wellington, NZ: Dept. of Internal Affairs, 1986), 5:16.

⁴⁷ “Important from the Chatham Islands”, *Wellington Independent*, 1 December 1868.

noted the people were “no fisher-folk”, advisedly so, he believed, as fishing from boats in coastal seas was extremely dangerous, not to mention the frightening presence of sharks. He had seen huge sharks swimming alongside vessels, cruising just below the surface while men surfed wool out to waiting ships. A shark once seized a steering oar and nearly wrenched a man overboard. Lyne was convinced these monsters “could and would attack and perhaps destroy an anchored fishing boat”. He would not risk going in over his knees, because of this “constant danger”.⁴⁸ Gillis explains this fear. While sharks did not feature as a predator until the beginning of the nineteenth century, their threatening image developed over the next 100 years.⁴⁹ The tropical “myth of the Man Eater” migrated across the globe, “replacing the whale as the greatest sea monster”.⁵⁰ This fear still exists in the Chatham Islands today, yet no known deaths can be attributed directly to a shark attack.⁵¹

The island’s fishing industry was established in 1910, when two Wellington based companies began operations on a commercial basis. The Chatham Island’s Fishing Company built a processing factory and freezing plant at Owenga, the site chosen due to good fishing grounds to the south of Manukau Point and around the southern cliffs.⁵² John McLean set up a similar plant at Kaingaroa.⁵³ Local boats were engaged exclusively in hand-line fishing, as the rocky, uncharted coast and depth of water made trawling impossible.⁵⁴ The industry provided permanent employment for a small number of island residents, and a satisfactory supplementary income for many more. This work appealed to younger men, both Māori and Pākehā, and those without access to land.⁵⁵ According to Richards, the industry considerably altered the social and economic fabric of island life; I discuss these effects in a later chapter, but for now, I concentrate on the fishermen’s experiences, and their evolving relationship with the sea.⁵⁶

⁴⁸ Robert Nunez Lyne, *The Chathams in the 1880's* (Self-published, Bath, England, 1948), 10, 36.

⁴⁹ Gillis, *The Human Shore*, 176.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁵¹ Jamie Brisick, “Not Surfing in the Chatham Islands,” accessed May 29, 2017, <https://www.surfersjournal.com/feature/not-surfing-chatham-islands/>.

⁵² “News of the Day”, *Press* (hereafter *PR*), 16 June 1910.

⁵³ “Chathams Fisheries”, *New Zealand Times* (hereafter *NZT*), 2 August 1910. McLean was a partner in the Wellington mercantile firm of McLean and Archibald.

⁵⁴ “After Blue Cod”, *Marlborough Express*, 19 August 1910.

⁵⁵ Colin George Dennison, “The Chatham Islands: A Study of Community and Economy in an Isolated Setting” (MA Thesis, University of Otago, 1966), 17.

⁵⁶ Rhys Richards, “An Historical Geography of Chatham Island” (MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, New Zealand, 1962), 85.

In the early years, fishing boats were small “day boats”, of between 25 and 35 feet, and each carried three or four fishermen (figure 2).⁵⁷ These launches were fitted with low power engines, and also carried a “good suit of sails”.⁵⁸ Most were built to a high standard by island workmen using imported kauri.⁵⁹ The season began between January and March, and ended in November, and many fishermen worked as shearers in the off-season. The industry was always spasmodic, with bursts of activity and rising production, followed by equally spectacular declines.⁶⁰ The New Zealand market proved disappointing, and most fish was marketed in Australia.⁶¹



Figure 2: Fishing vessels at Owenga, 1924. Private collection of Bryce Shirtcliffe.

Catches were exceptional while the weather was good, and these conditions could last for up to a month.⁶² But the islands’ environment proved fickle. Heavy gales and high seas often prevented the fleet from going out, and according to Holmes, on average,

⁵⁷ David Holmes, *My Seventy Years on the Chatham Islands: Reminiscences* (Christchurch N.Z.: Shoal Bay Press, 1993), 122.

⁵⁸ Frank Saxton, “The Old Cod Days at the Chatham Islands Revisited,” *Catch*, August 1983, 11.

⁵⁹ Holmes, *ibid.*, 122.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.; Dennison, 155.

⁶¹ “Future of Chathams”, *New Zealand Herald* (hereafter *NZH*), 13 August 1925.

⁶² “Chatham Islands: Fish and Sheep are Money-Makers”, *PR*, 13 January 1951.

fishing was only possible 90 days a year.⁶³ Disheartened by these “peculiar conditions”, fishermen realised they were unlikely to “become millionaires”.⁶⁴ In 1935, a New Zealand fisherman spoke of the “thrills and terrors” of working in Chatham waters. When over a fishing ground, there was “a continual driving of a heavy swell”, and if the anchorage was not secure, the boat might drift up to twenty miles. Some came uncomfortably close to rocky reefs encircling the islands. Although more fish were available in these waters, poor weather, rough seas, and the inability to catch them made fishing less profitable than on the mainland.⁶⁵

Fish were remarkably easily caught under good conditions, because almost as soon as lines were cast overboard, the hooks were full. Nevertheless, the fishermen’s lives were extremely hard. Each used two hand-lines, with a total of six hooks, and as one line was hauled up, the other was dropped overboard. The men often complained of sore hands, especially after several days hauling in the heavily laden lines. They told Holmes that eight consecutive days was as much as they could bear, as by then, they “felt like they had no hands left”. A spell of rough weather was welcomed.⁶⁶

In the absence of wharves, unloading the catch was uncomfortable and cumbersome.⁶⁷ Fish were bagged on the boat, and loaded into dinghies to go ashore. At Owenga, to reach the foreshore below the freezer, the men must row around a spit of land; dinghies were often swamped, and an appreciable amount of fish lost.⁶⁸ Bags were transferred to a dray drawn by three horses; this entered the surf as far as possible, but any appreciable swell put a stop to this exercise.⁶⁹ The catch was then weighed, cleaned, and packaged at the plant.⁷⁰ Loading the company steamer was done in reverse order, an equally laborious task that could only take place when wind and sea conditions allowed.⁷¹ Packaged fish was carted out in drays, but keeping it dry was no easy task in an unpredictable surf. From there, the boxes were transferred to surf boats, and finally taken aboard the steamer.⁷²

⁶³ “Local and General”, *Nelson Evening Mail*, 9 May 1911, and numerous other reports. Holmes, *ibid.*, 123.

⁶⁴ “A Trip to the Forty-Fours”, *Otago Daily Times* (hereafter *ODT*), 1 March 1913; “A Lonely Outpost”, *Evening Post* (hereafter *EP*), 17 March 1917.

⁶⁵ “Chatham Islands”, *PR*, 16 May 1935.

⁶⁶ Holmes, *ibid.*, 123.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁶⁸ Maxwell W. Young, “The Fishing Industry in the Chatham Islands,” *New Zealand Journal of Science and Technology* 6 (1923), 50.

⁶⁹ “Cod-Fishing at Chathams”, *Lake Wakatip Mail*, 14 November 1946.

⁷⁰ Holmes, *ibid.*, 122.

⁷¹ Young, 50.

⁷² Holmes, *ibid.*

Sensational “fish stories” often emanated from the Chathams, and it seems Lyne’s dire predictions of shark problems were not without foundation. As fishermen hauled in lines sharks sometimes snapped the fish in half, and teeth marks left in keels were mementoes of menacing behaviour of larger sharks.⁷³ These were proudly shown to visitors, to quell any suggestion of embellished “fish stories”.⁷⁴ The daily reality was generally more mundane, but none the less, sharks provided some exciting moments, and kept the would-be bather from the sea.

From the early 1930s, several New Zealand companies engaged in the “mothership system” of fishing in Chatham waters. The first to arrive was the trawler *South Sea*, the largest fishing vessel in Australasia at that time, and the first to engage in deep sea fishing in New Zealand waters.⁷⁵ These operations existed parallel to shore-based activities, but larger trawlers could fish at greater distances from the island, and for longer periods.⁷⁶ Many smaller boats operated from each, sometimes more than the entire shore station.⁷⁷ In 1983, a retired cod fisherman spoke of life working on a mothership. Thirteen or 14 men handlined all day, and later, when the smaller boats returned, hauled catches aboard. The men “cleaned up a bit” before having a meal, and then “it was back into the wet, stinking, oilskins, to head and gut the entire days catch and stack it down in the freezers ... if there was any time left before daybreak we might get some sleep!”⁷⁸ “We were always tired”, he said, “except when the weather was crook, in which case we slept all day”.⁷⁹ Boats might remain at sea for a fortnight, riding out storms, and fishing when conditions permitted.⁸⁰

Life on a small fishing launch was no more comfortable. Later, the same cod fisherman purchased his own boat, and “fished into” a mothership. Accommodation was basic, with short narrow bunks on either side of the engine. Oil leaked over the bedding, and water seeped through the deck, “so nothing was ever dry” and “we stank, stank like polecats.”⁸¹ It was difficult to keep the deck free of slime and muck, “the stink got into the wood, the boat stank and we stank, our clothes stank of rotten fish, of course, we

⁷³ “Chatham Islands, *PR*, 10 March 1930; “Fish from the Chathams”, *Ashburton Guardian* (hereafter *AG*), 26 November 1910.

⁷⁴ “Chatham Islands, *PR*, 10 March 1930.

⁷⁵ “Chatham Island Fisheries”, *PR* 16 July 1932. *South Sea* was brought from England.

⁷⁶ Dennison, 18-19.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁷⁸ Saxton, 11-12. Saxton was the islands fisheries officer at that time.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ “Fish and Sheep are Money-Makers”.

⁸¹ Saxton, 12.

didn't notice. It was only when we came ashore and other people smelt us, or when we first went back to sea".⁸²

As fishing grounds were "thinned", shore-based fishermen travelled up to 30 miles to find better fishing grounds. In fine weather, boats might leave their moorings at two in the morning. Given the risk of being disabled far off shore, or being swamped while returning with heavy loads, small boats would no longer venture out alone.⁸³ They always intended to return before nightfall, but things did not always go to plan. Some considered the sight of boats returning to Kaingaroa by moonlight "a fine spectacle", but late arrivals caused some stress to Robert Paynter, the manager of the fishing depot.⁸⁴ Uncharted reefs lurked in the darkness, and with no permanent lights to guide boats in, these waters still posed a significant hazard.⁸⁵ Staff were sent out to line the beach with lanterns, a small but somehow reassuring measure to help keep the men safe. At Owenga, the little Anglican Church was situated right at the entrance to the bay, its lights serving as a beacon for "those in peril on the sea".⁸⁶

Castaways all

At times, the Chatham Islanders did perceive their lives as peripheral, almost other worldly. In the scholarly field of island studies, the small, remote, and insular nature of islands often suggests "being on the edge, being out of sight and so out of mind".⁸⁷ On one bleak winter afternoon, while riding along the shore of Hanson Bay, McGregor and his workmate experienced a cataclysmic sense of being at Earth's extremity. By four o'clock, he wrote, "it was coming on dark, heavy clouds, and the only light was the reflection from three lines of breakers on the beach". In the heavy gloom, "my cobber said to me, 'My God, McGregor, you would think it was the end of the world'".⁸⁸

Lyne poignantly expressed a sense of vulnerability and remoteness, claiming that in "that lonely spot in the Pacific Ocean", fears were heightened by knowing, that should tragedy overtake them, "no human aid was nigh".⁸⁹ Lyne believed islanders shared an affinity with seafarers; life on this low-lying island, open on all sides to the

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Sandhills Magazine, Te One School, 1934-35, 1st Edition, MS-Papers-0434-56, William Burt Beverland Collection, ATL.

⁸⁴ Sandhills Magazine, 1939, Centennial Number, *ibid*.

⁸⁵ "Fish and Sheep are Money-Makers".

⁸⁶ "Chatham Island Notes", *PR*, 4 March 1924.

⁸⁷ Godfrey Baldacchino, "Islands, Island Studies, Island Studies Journal," *Island Studies Journal* 1, no. 1 (2006): 6.

⁸⁸ McGregor, 10.

⁸⁹ Lyne, 27.

elements, sometimes felt like a shipboard experience, tossed about at the mercy of winds and seas. This was hardly dwelled upon, but the accord with seafarers was keenly felt on Sunday evenings at Wharekauri, when station staff gathered for prayers and hymns. Lyne recalled one in particular, “the final always, sung with great feeling”.⁹⁰ Appealing to God on behalf of mariners, Lyne believes the words were delivered with heartfelt sincerity, because those gathered sometimes shared the same anxiety as endangered and ship-wrecked mariners.⁹¹ It seems likely the hymn was “Eternal Father, Strong to Save”, also known as For Those in Peril on the Sea.⁹²

On occasion, the terraqueous meeting places of ship and island met unexpectedly on the shore. For shipwrecked crews, the shore was often a place of unpredictability and danger, and initial meetings were fraught with fear and tension. Islanders had interesting encounters with strangers from the sea. In December 1893, two shepherds on Wharekauri Station got quite a fright when coming upon a group of men, “armed to the teeth with guns and cutlasses”.⁹³ They came from *Jessie Readman*, which had run aground on Taupeka beach in the early hours of that morning. Both parties were cautious, and tensions only eased once the crew were assured of being in friendly territory.⁹⁴ The men were accommodated at the station, but with no communication with the outside world, rescue was some months away. Ship-wrecked crews were generally well-cared for in the Chathams.

Islanders were often called upon to assist beleaguered mariners. In 1885, in a leaking state, the sailing ship *Plejaden* attempted to beach near Matarakau.⁹⁵ It struck a submerged rock some distance off shore, and before the crew could abandon ship, heavy seas came up and destroyed all the boats. A boat was sent out from the shore, and in a delicate and dangerous operation, the German crew were got safely ashore.⁹⁶ Some had experienced more harrowing experiences at sea. On Christmas Eve 1918, the American barque *Aryan* was destroyed by fire some 300 miles east of the Chathams. After two and a half days rowing, two of the ship’s boats reached Skirmish Bay. That night, as McGregor was casually strolling along the beach, he heard the unexpected sound of

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 26.

⁹² This hymn was written by William Whiting in 1860. Inspired by Psalm 107, it speaks of the dangers of the sea, and is traditionally associated with mariners and naval men.

⁹³ McGregor, 13.

⁹⁴ “How the Jessie Readman was Stranded”, *TIM*, 20 January 1894; McGregor, 13.

⁹⁵ “Wreck of the Barque Plejaden”, *Grey River Argus*, 29 April 1885.

⁹⁶ Ibid; E. R. Chudleigh, *Diary of E.R. Chudleigh, 1862-1921: Chatham Islands*, ed. Eva Carlisle Richards (Christchurch: Simpson and Williams, 1950), 332.

rowboats, and stood lighting matches to guide the strangers in. The Captain stepped ashore, and offered him a shot of whisky and a cigar. To McGregor, this was a surreal encounter, a bizarre scene on a dark and lonely beach. There were momentary concerns when he spied a gun hidden among papers in the captain's bag, but he quickly set the newcomers minds at rest, and the exhausted survivors were soon given shelter and food.⁹⁷



Figure 3: Refloating a stranded steamer: Unloading the cargo of the Himitangi at the Chatham Islands previous to towing her off. F. Ritchie, *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 April 1912. Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, AWNS-19120411-1-2. <http://www.aucklandcity.govt.nz>.

For some, awaiting rescue at the Chathams was nothing more than an unscheduled holiday. In 1912, while *Himitangi* lay on the beach in Petre Bay, mainlanders agonized over her fate (figure 3). Meanwhile, near the “scene of the misadventure”, crew and passengers had a “quiet holiday”, and enjoyed the hospitality of people in the vicinity⁹⁸ In 1924, the stricken *Rama* was beached at Okawa, and twenty-two crew were “happily quartered” at Kaingaroa Station. With good accommodation and plenty of food, the only

⁹⁷ McGregor, 14.

⁹⁸ “Himitangi Safe”, *Dominion* (hereafter *DOM*), 7 March 1912.

drawback to this “enforced holiday” was the lack of “liquid refreshment” of the appealing kind. Riding 30 miles to Waitangi over rough country was quite a disincentive, especially as most could not ride. And even if they could there were not enough horses.⁹⁹

Flotsam

Even fierce gales had positive consequences for the Chatham Islanders. As Sigley wrote, “stormy seas leaping on the long coast” brought “treasures from the deep sea ... shells of curious shape and radiant hues strew the shores, rubies and emeralds glitter in the sands, not very large ones truly but still genuine, precious stones”.¹⁰⁰ Fanny Chatwin, a teacher at Te One School in the early 1900s, gathered tiny rubies on a northern beach, and always kept these “curiosities from the island”.¹⁰¹ The quantity and variety of shells made collecting a popular pastime, and even attracted scientific interest.¹⁰² Auckland Museum conchologist, A. W. B. Powell, wrote of his visit in 1939:

Marine life in the Chathams, considering its latitude, is for the most part surprisingly brightly coloured, and on somewhat rare occasions, when the prevailing south-westerly wind moderates and the sun penetrates the usual mist and haze, the snow-white shelly beaches, strewn with handsome shells, are reminiscent of tropic isles. Only the huge brown seething masses of kelp and the stunted coastal vegetation remind one of the boisterous conditions that only too frequently prevail.¹⁰³

Many appreciated the beauty of the shells, and found the beach a space of “heightened sensibilities”.¹⁰⁴ Maude Seymour wrote of shells “scintillating in the sun as the spray or wavelets wash over them, all colours of the rainbow in their brightest and beautiful hues delight the eye”.¹⁰⁵ Women were not alone in their admiration. While travelling the island in 1920, Frederick McClurg found the beach at Te Raki Bay a veritable paradise

⁹⁹ “The Rama”, *PR*, 4 December 1924.

¹⁰⁰ Sigley.

¹⁰¹ The author collected tiny rubies on the beach at Kaingaroa in 1967, and was told these were genuine gemstones, but too small to be used in the jewellery or watchmaking industries. They were found on the sandbars of small lagoons.

¹⁰² “A Second Visit to Chatham Islands”, *PR*, 17 February 1892.

¹⁰³ “Eastward Lie the Chathams!”, *AS*, 3 June 1939. Arthur William Baden Powell was also a palaeontologist.

¹⁰⁴ Preston-Whyte, 349.

¹⁰⁵ Maud Ella Seymour, “A History of the Chatham Islands” (MA Thesis, University of New Zealand, 1924), 15.

for the shell collector.¹⁰⁶ “Exposed to the storms of ages”, deep piles of shell covered at least four miles of beach. Many were pāua (*halotis iris*), although rarer specimens were found.¹⁰⁷ Their “iridescent, mother-of-pearl surfaces” gleamed in the sunshine, and “made a picture not easily forgotten”. In fact, the beauty of the scene moved him to recall “the beautiful lines”,

The bridegroom Sea is toying with the shore; his wedded bride;
And in the fulness of his marriage joy
He decorates her tawny brow with shells,
Retires a space to see how fair she looks,
Then proud runs up to kiss her.¹⁰⁸

Most island residents had more pragmatic reasons to scan the beaches, and the amount of flotsam and jetsam retrieved suggests a close watch was kept along the coastline. In fact, Wharekauri, the name Māori gave to Chatham Island, is said to derive from a large kauri (*Agathis australis*) log washed up on a beach. As karaka (*Corynocarpus laevigatus*, known as kopi in the Chathams) was the largest timber on the island, this “drift-away” from the New Zealand coast was a welcome gift from the sea.¹⁰⁹ Cedar, rimu (*Dacrydium cupressinum*) and totara (*Podocarpus totara*) logs were also washed ashore, providing fence posts and buildings for the settlers.¹¹⁰ Shipwrecks also provided useful building material. In 1882, Robertson noted cabin doors and other pieces of wreckage formed some component of almost every house.¹¹¹ In 1913, the Reverend Charles Fraer also found at least “some memento” of a ship wreck incorporated in dwellings, with some houses built largely from the timbers of wrecked vessels. Many had furnishings from ships’ cabins.¹¹² In 1859, Frederick Hunt of Pitt Island was able to enlarge his house using timbers, doors, and windows from the whaling ship *Franklin*.¹¹³ The Chathams were close to the course of vessels bound for England by Cape Horn, and in fine weather, ships were often glimpsed in the distance.¹¹⁴ Alarming, however, much material

¹⁰⁶ Frederick C. McClurg, *An Idler at the Chathams: And Other Essays* (Napier, N.Z.: Herald Print, 1925), 3.

¹⁰⁷ “An Idler at the Chathams”, *Otago Witness*, 28 December 1920.

¹⁰⁸ McClurg, *An Idler*, 3. This is part of a poem by English poet Alexander Smith, first published about 1856.

¹⁰⁹ “Chatham Islands”, *AS*, 25 March 1933.

¹¹⁰ David Holmes, “Flotsam and Jetsam”. In this instance, “settlers” refers to both Māori and Pākehā, as neither were indigenous to the Chatham Islands.

¹¹¹ Robertson, 90.

¹¹² “Life in the Chathams”, *PR*, 25 March 1913.

¹¹³ William Carter, Kohatu - The New Zealand Connection, Grinnell Family Association of America Official Website, last modified April 28, 2015, <http://www.grinnellfamily.org>.

¹¹⁴ “Chatham Islands”, *WA*, 13 October 1906.

washed ashore came from unknown shipwrecks, and every effort was made to find identifying material, to ascertain which vessel it belonged to. Finds were reported to the Marine Department in New Zealand at the earliest opportunity.¹¹⁵

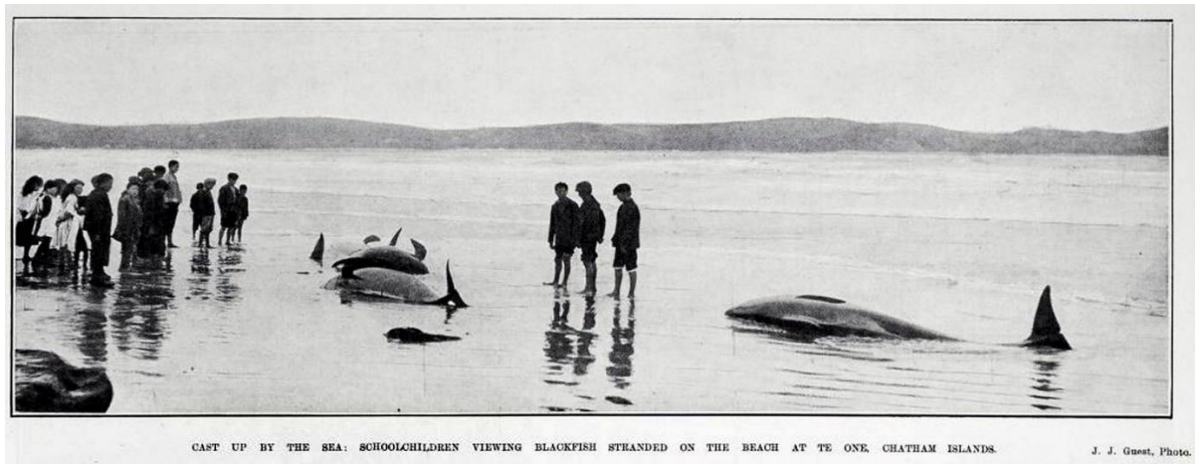


Figure 4: Cast up by the sea. Schoolchildren viewing blackfish stranded on the beach at Te One, Chatham Islands. J. J. Guest, *Auckland Weekly News*, 18 July 1912, Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, AWNS-19120718-11-1. <http://www.aucklandcity.govt.nz>.

While flotsam and jetsam sparked interest and concern for those in ships on the ocean, they were also a constant reminder of the islanders' place within wider environmental systems, of being connected by winds and currents to events in other places. Remnants of ships and cargoes travelled great distances, and these had stories to tell. In late 1890, there was great excitement over an unknown wreck, at an unknown place, as with every wind shift, a range of different cargo and wreckage came ashore.¹¹⁶ Candles washed up on northern beaches kept local houses well-lit for several years. It was suspected the items came from *Assaye*, missing en route from London, and eventually, marine authorities used barnacles on candles to determine that the ship had likely come to grief on the Snares islands, about 200 km south of New Zealand.¹¹⁷ In 1941, drums of fine lubricating oil came floating in, and their origin eventually traced to deck cargo lost overboard in Cook Strait. Whenever blackfish (longfinned pilot whale) stranded on the shore, Māori and Pākehā extracted the oil, to fuel lanterns, and to preserve harness and leather (Figure 4). Fresh was definitely best, as oil tried from fresh blackfish had little

¹¹⁵ A number of newspaper accounts mention this.

¹¹⁶ "The Barque *Assaye*", *PR*, 17 October 1890.

¹¹⁷ "The Loss of the *Kakanui* and *Assaye*", *NZT*, 12 March 1891.

odour. However, it “was a bit high” if left too long, and as local historian David Holmes drily noted, anyone whose saddle was oiled with it “was as welcome in a house as a dog that had rolled in a carcase”.¹¹⁸

Natural incursions

From the 1880s, coastal grazing initiated the movement of sand, an unmanageable incursion that destroyed trees and bush in its path.¹¹⁹ In 1840, Ernst Dieffenbach, naturalist with the New Zealand Company, spoke of verdant bush protecting the coast of Chatham Island. Shrubs in exposed places, which look as though “shortened by the syckle of the gardener”, formed a natural barrier, and if left in place, winds sweeping the island could not be detrimental to inland vegetation.¹²⁰ When settlers took up sheep farming from the mid-1860s, the coastal sand hills were covered in thick grasses and low shrubs.¹²¹ All but one of the larger farming properties were bounded by the sea, but until about 1880, sheep were grazed on the clears. Early Europeans applied this term to open areas devoid of tall vegetation, and primarily covered with thick tarahinau (*Dracophyllum arboretum*). Here, there were “extensive areas of native grass and tussock”, along with flax and other swamp vegetation, and very little fern. This changed rapidly, as inexperienced farmers used regular burning as a means of improving soil fertility.¹²² Few attempted pasture improvements, and when combined with overstocking, management practices prevented the regeneration of grasses.¹²³ Bracken fern took over, and fewer sheep could be grazed.¹²⁴

Farmers then chose to graze the coastal strip more intensively. The mere presence of stock ensured the gradual degradation of nature’s shield, simply by letting in the wind. As wind destroyed natural vegetation and undergrowth along the seashore, the dense inner canopy was opened to the elements.¹²⁵ Wind-blown sand penetrated the perimeter of land and shore, piling into travelling dunes and moving gradually inland. As early as 1882, Robertson commented on rapidly shifting sand, diminishing fertile areas between sand and peat, and inundating cultivations and houses.¹²⁶ Some

¹¹⁸ Holmes, “Flotsam and Jetsam”. Since 1901, over 4000 longfinned pilot whales are reported to have stranded on the Chathams.

¹¹⁹ Holmes, *My Seventy Years*, 161.

¹²⁰ “Description of the Chatham Islands”, *New Zealand Gazette and Wellington Spectator*, 3 October 1840.

¹²¹ Robertson, 81.

¹²² Holmes, *ibid.*, 19.

¹²³ Rhys Richards, “An Historical Geography”, 65.

¹²⁴ Holmes, *ibid.*, 171.

¹²⁵ Elliott, 160-61. Wild pigs and cattle also destroyed habitat.

¹²⁶ Robertson, 81.

farmers with the means, such as Chudleigh of Wharekauri and Barker of Kaingaroa, fenced the coastal margin.¹²⁷ Others tried various plantings, seeking an “efficient bulwark against the encroaching enemy”, but these had indifferent results.¹²⁸ Subject to heavy salt spray, no grass could establish quickly enough on open sand.¹²⁹ Areas of cultivation were soon limited to just a few acres, and according to Holmes, shifting sand eventually affected up to 60 miles of coastline.¹³⁰

In 1890, the Wishart brothers, farmers at Te One, raised plants of European marram grass (*Ammophila arenaria*), which was known for its sand-binding qualities. These were established along the coastal sandhills of their property. Encouraged by its success, they sold plants to other landholders, and some employed men as planters.¹³¹ However, not all stretches of coast were protected in this way, and by 1902, hundreds of acres of excellent land had been inundated, and further “devastation” was threatened.¹³² This ongoing incursion forced many smallholders off their land.¹³³

In 1868, a terrifying tsunami struck the Chathams, destroying property, and shattering the islanders’ sense of safety. Triggered by a severe earthquake in Chile, this remains the largest recorded distant tsunami to strike the New Zealand coast. In the early hours of 15 August, waves reached the Chathams, the first land mass in their path.¹³⁴ In hindsight, islanders realised how fortunate they were, because if not for the sequence of events, many more lives would have been lost. John Amery, a local newspaper correspondent, was staying at Te Raki on the north-west coast, in the worst affected area. He woke with the first wave, which rushed in “with such force and noise that the very fountain of the deep seemed broken up”. Thankfully, this served as a warning of worse to come, and Amery and his host escaped without injury. Ten minutes later, another “vast breaker” enveloped the house, leaving the substantial dwelling in ruins. The third and largest wave “completed the catastrophe”. It snatched up the

¹²⁷ “A Second Visit to Chatham Islands”, *PR*, 17 February 1892; “Press Release, Barker Bros. Ltd”, 17 February 1988, *Chatham Islands New and Views*, Chatham Islands County Council, March 1988. The Rangikapua Reserve at Kaingaroa was fenced in 1891, possibly becoming the first private reserve in New Zealand. In 1988, it was home to many rare and endangered plant species. In recent times a fire caused considerable damage, but the reserve still exists.

¹²⁸ Robertson, 81; “The Chatham Islands”, *Lyttelton Times* (hereafter *LT*), 8 May 1888.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 81, 82.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 82. and David Holmes, “Marram Grass”, *Chatham Island News and Views*, n. d.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² “The Chatham Islands”, *Star* (hereafter *SR*), 24 January 1902.

¹³³ Interview with Jane Hough, in Michael King Papers, 97-042-10/08, ATL.

¹³⁴ Henry O. Forbes, “The Chatham Islands and Their Story,” in *The Fortnightly Review* (Chapman and Hall, 1893), 679.

debris and carried it up to four miles inland, inundating pastures, and carrying away livestock from low lying areas.¹³⁵

At daybreak, barefoot and half-naked, the men walked five miles along the coast to the nearest neighbour at Waitangi West. They found Captain Hans Anderson and his family in a bivouac in the bush, above the site of their ruined home. More “pitiable” was the sight that greeted them at Tupuangi, four miles further on. The village, once the most flourishing of the Māori settlements, was completely obliterated, and the whole area covered with sand and seaweed. Miraculously, the 70 residents reached safety on higher ground, but all possessions were lost. The people soon removed to nearby Maunganui, and at a height of 178m, set up a makeshift camp. Many were preparing to return to Taranaki at that time, and the wave took a large sum of money, the proceeds from the sale of stock and other goods.¹³⁶

A similar pattern of waves was experienced at Waitangi, where many buildings along the foreshore were damaged or destroyed. Beamish’s Accommodation House was wrenched from its piles, and Selwood’s Store destroyed. The shopkeeper and his family narrowly escaped the third wave, climbing through a window, and reaching higher ground just in time.¹³⁷ Several whale boats were smashed to pieces, and a boat house belonging to the Customs Department washed away, along with a substantial amount of government stores. When waves subsided, the residents beheld “a most disheartening spectacle”. Among the piles of sand and seaweed on the beach were ruined bags of flour and other foodstuffs, and damaged household effects of every description littered the area.¹³⁸ At Owenga, several Māori dwellings over 30 feet above sea level were destroyed, along with five whaleboats.¹³⁹ Remarkably, in all this devastation, only one life was lost. Makare, who worked for Hans Anderson, drowned while trying to save his employer’s whaleboat. He was a strong swimmer, but no match for the turbulent seas that followed the tsunami. He was caught in a backwash and swept away.¹⁴⁰

After this devastating experience, some feared these low-lying islands would be completely submerged in some future disaster, and many more Māori were anxious to

¹³⁵ “Chatham Islands”, *Hawke’s Bay Herald* (hereafter *HBH*), 12 September 1868.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ “Chatham Islands”, *HBH*, 27 October 1868.

¹³⁸ “Tidal Wave at the Chathams”, *Nelson Examiner and New Zealand Chronicle*, 8 September 1868.

¹³⁹ “Chatham Islands”, *HBH*, *ibid.* Whaleboats were an important vessel for coast-dwellers throughout New Zealand. Whangaroa and Kaingaroa were not adversely affected by this wave.

¹⁴⁰ “Chatham Islands”, *HBH*, 12 September 1868; “Earthquake Wave at the Chatham Islands”, *Wanganui Herald* (hereafter *WH*), 31 August 1868. This is the only officially recorded tsunami death in New Zealand.

leave.¹⁴¹ Unsurprisingly, Hans Anderson, a former ship's captain, gave up shore life and returned to sea.¹⁴² Residual fear was still evident in 1895, when a "weather prophet" in New Zealand predicted a huge earthquake wave. This caused great panic, especially among those affected in 1868. At Waitangi, boats and valuables were moved to higher ground.¹⁴³ Māori deserted the pa and set up camp above the cliffs.¹⁴⁴ The prophecy proved false, and it was 29 years before islanders were faced with a similar disaster.

In July 1924, the fishing industry suffered a severe setback when a large tsunami hit parts of the island.¹⁴⁵ It struck in the evening, while Kaingaroa fishermen were playing cards in their huts. Alerted by "a terrible roar" from the sea, they rushed outside, and as the sound grew louder, ran for higher ground behind the village. Within seconds of reaching safety the huts were demolished. The freezing works and many fishing launches were damaged; one boat completely disappeared, and dinghies were destroyed.¹⁴⁶ Further along the beach, the wave surged inland, washing away a dam at Lake Te Wapu, and destroying the factories fresh water supply. The factory was forced to close for over a year.¹⁴⁷ At Owenga, two fishing vessels were destroyed, and dinghies were smashed to "kindling wood".¹⁴⁸ At Pitt Island, a small wharf was swept away.¹⁴⁹ George Clough had the luckiest of escapes. He was washed off his horse while riding along a beach and only saved himself by clinging to a fence. The horse was found safe and well the next day, but the fence was nowhere to be seen.¹⁵⁰

A few days later, the island's regular trading vessel arrived at the island, and those aboard *Tees* had their own tales to tell. Struck by the same waves, the ship was suddenly turned on its side. Passengers screamed in terror as they were thrown about, and the roar of escaping steam from the engine room was deafening. Chaos ensued until the ship gradually righted itself, but the troubles had just begun. The capsized damaged

¹⁴¹ Frank A. Simpson, *Chatham Exiles: Yesterday and Today at the Chatham Islands* (Wellington N.Z.: Reed, 1950), 120. David Holmes, "Chatham Islands - Tidal Waves", in MS-Papers-1681, Holmes, David, Chatham Island Papers, ATL.

¹⁴² "Page 1 Advertisements Column 6", *LT*, 7 December 1871.

¹⁴³ Major F. J. W. Gascoyne, *Soldiering in New Zealand* (London: T. J. S. Guilford and Company, Ltd., 1916), 145. <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-GasSold-t1-body-d12.html>.

¹⁴⁴ "The Chatham Islands", *NZH*, 14 January 1895. The pa was on low-lying ground alongside the Nairn or Waitangi River.

¹⁴⁵ While the source of this tsunami is unknown, it was possibly due to a submarine landslide in the locality, or an unidentified earthquake.

¹⁴⁶ "A Close Call", *PR*, 2 August 1924; David Holmes, "Tidal Waves"; "Tidal Wave at Chatham Islands", *PR*, 4 August 1924.

¹⁴⁷ "Caught by Tidal Wave", *NZH*, 4 August 1924.

¹⁴⁸ David Holmes, "Tidal Waves".

¹⁴⁹ "Ocean Upheaval", *Northern Advocate*, 2 August 1924.

¹⁵⁰ David Holmes, "Tidal Waves".

the ship's engine, and in stormy seas, crew struggled to effect temporary repairs. Over a harrowing few days *Tees* drifted over 100 miles off course before some power was restored. No further repairs were possible on the island, so only by "nursing the engines" could the ship complete the return voyage. Captain Dowell, who had vast experience in these waters, claimed with relief, "My word, it was the closest thing I have ever experienced".¹⁵¹

Conclusion

By embracing oceans, winds, weather, and currents as "history determining phenomena", this chapter lays aside those "enduring couplets" of land and sea, earth and ocean, and adds to a growing recognition that seas as well as earth hold a special place within world societies.¹⁵² Foregrounding coast, beach, and shore as terraqueous meeting places historicizes these sites in new ways, while a sensory approach emphasises this fusion, highlighting these spaces as dynamic sites of enquiry.

In comparison to many other oceanic peoples, the Chatham Islanders were less able to travel independently abroad, primarily due to the island's lack of suitable ship building materials. Nevertheless, they were far from neatly contained or insulated from the wider world.¹⁵³ Thoughts and curiosity extended outwards, to distant peoples and places, and passing ships highlighted man's pathways to elsewhere. Reminders of the world beyond were washed ashore in both material and human form. With few geographical features to shield and protect, the people were fully aware of the island's permeability, and of being on nature's pathway to elsewhere. They understood their place within climatic forces of nature, and understood many life experiences as products of wider systems.

This chapter shows how islands are not necessarily more isolated than other places, that isolation is more a state of mind.¹⁵⁴ Given the changing moods of sea and climate, this was not a static atmosphere; in fact, at times, islanders felt at the very centre of the elements, rather than on the periphery, but never totally disconnected. Bashford claims that all littoral societies might effectively be redefined as terraqueous, and believes this concept improves on littoral history. The Chatham Islands and environs have proved the ideal site in which to examine the lived and felt experiences of

¹⁵¹ "A Close Call", *PR*, 2 August 1924.

¹⁵² Bashford, 3, 4, 6.

¹⁵³ Gillis, *Islands of the Mind*, 7.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 118-19.

coast dwellers, fishermen, and mariners.¹⁵⁵ Voyages between the Chathams and New Zealand provided little opportunity for the ship to develop into a “floating state”, rather, as I go on to show, this was more a site of floating misery, a terraqueous meeting place of the unenviable kind. However, reimagining the island as a floating ship, and ships as floating islands, this chapter effectively foregrounds a sense of permeability and vulnerability, to show how fear and uncertainty sometimes gripped the inhabitants of the region, whether on land or water.¹⁵⁶ This supports Bashford’s claim, that in some circumstances, terraqueous meeting places such as coastlines, islands and ships can be examined collectively. When understood as fusions of earth, water, and atmosphere, Chatham Island is anything but a passive environment, contained on a speck of land, within a vast surrounding ocean.

¹⁵⁵ Bashford, 10.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 12.

Chapter 2: Terra (In)firma: Mobility on Chatham Island

Much of Chatham Island is low lying, with gentle rolling topography interspersed by the occasional small volcanic peak, and there are no mountains or large rivers. To the uninitiated, this presents no obvious barriers to mobility, but appearances are deceiving. The peculiarities of climate and landscape often hindered, and sometimes even prevented, travel between scattered clusters of population. Focusing on the everyday experiences of moving from place to place, this chapter argues that lives were shaped by an environment which significantly challenged in-island mobility. At first glance, this seems a rather fundamental claim, but this chapter forms a necessary foundation for understanding issues raised throughout this thesis, such as social atomisation, lack of civic amenities, and access to medical care, factors influencing identity and community formation.

Chatham Island abounded in formidable natural obstacles, not least of all Te Whanga Lagoon, which covers an area of 20,000 hectares. Innocuous looking ground often harboured concealed peat swamps and bogs, deep enough to engulf a horse and rider, and these were present in the most unexpected places. Tracks were often dangerous and impassable after rain, and in the Waitangi area, thoroughfares regularly turned to an expanse of deep mud. Given these conditions, and the lack of gravel on the island, it was impossible to create a firm base, let alone durable surfaces. These environments help illuminate why no pathway deserving of the name “road” was brought into existence during the first 100 years of European settlement.

As roads and rail advanced in New Zealand, the Chatham Island ways and pace of life increasingly defied mainland expectations and norms. Outside observers often failed to understand the people’s inertia.¹ As Tim Cresswell explains, in Western society, mobility often signifies progress, freedom, and opportunity.² To be modern was, above all else, to be a “mobile human being”.³ Sociologists understand that healthy social co-existence depends on being with others, and humans are reliant on freedom of movement to achieve this. For extended periods, the Chatham Islanders were deprived of those repeated everyday exchanges central to the enjoyment of daily life, the human rewards of communication and shared activities. Widespread winter lethargy can be

¹ Gerald A. Arbuckle, *The Chatham Islands in Perspective - a Socio-Economic Review* (Wellington: Hicks Smith, 1971), 42.

² Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 2.

³ *Ibid.*, 15.

ascribed to an imposed isolation that effectively removed people's ability to manage social interactions.⁴

Scholars have recently offered some new perspectives on the relationship between environment and culture. In *Climate, Science, and Colonization: Histories from Australia and New Zealand*, James Beattie, Matthew Henry and Emily O'Gorman consider "weather" and "climate" as both physical phenomena and "constructed cultural meanings".⁵ I argue that sensory characteristics of the islander's world generated shared understandings, and acceptance as to effect, for instance, shared perceptions of winter gloom and inertia. Therefore, this insight might be regarded as a cultural construct, engendered not only by weather and climate, but also the restraints and limitations of the land underfoot.

Mobility and movement

From the early nineteenth century, Pākehā and Māori walked the paths of indigenous Moriori, following easier terrain along beaches and sand hills wherever possible.⁶ From the early 1850s, Māori traded potatoes for horses with Sydney merchants, and the horse became the principal mode of transport for over 100 years.⁷ As in other burgeoning New Zealand settlements, the want of roads and bridges was keenly felt, and settlers looked to every opportunity to improve their ability to move across the terrain.⁸ In 1866, the New Zealand Government established a penal colony at Waitangi, and over 300 Pai Mārire or "Hauhau" prisoners were sent to the Chathams. Their arrival was initially met with "gloomy forebodings", but islanders soon realised the benefits outweighed concerns.⁹ In early 1867, a Pai Mārire work party excavated a "fine wide level road" through an almost perpendicular hill in the township.¹⁰ Residents in the

⁴ Frances Hodgson, "Structures of Encounterability: Space, Place, Paths and Identity," in *Mobilities: New Perspectives on Transport and Society*, ed. John Urry and Margaret Grieco (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2012), 41-42.

⁵ James Beattie, Matthew Henry, and Emily O'Gorman, "Introduction," in *Climate, Science, and Colonization: Histories from Australia and New Zealand*, ed. James Beattie, Matthew Henry, and Emily O'Gorman (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 1.

⁶ David Holmes, *My Seventy Years on the Chatham Islands: Reminiscences* (Christchurch, N.Z.: Shoal Bay Press, 1993), 109.

⁷ "Chatham Islands," *LT*, 5 March 1862.

⁸ "Chatham Islands," *HBH*, 27 April 1867.

⁹ "Chatham Islands," *Wellington Independent*, 18 April 1867; "Chatham Islands," *HBH*, 2 March 1867. The prisoners were never convicted of any crime. About 328 Māori were sent to the Chathams, and almost half of this number were the wives and children of those transported.

¹⁰ James Cowan, *The New Zealand Wars: A History of the Maori Campaigns and the Pioneering Period*, Vol. 2, *New Zealand Wars (1845-1872)*, (Wellington, N.Z.: R. E. Owen, 1956), 224. "Local and General News," *TH*, 30 March 1867.

vicinity were fully-aware of progress, as with each successive mass of earth that tumbled down, the “simultaneous shouts” of the prisoners were almost deafening.¹¹

Residents gladly accepted this one disturbance to the township’s usual tranquillity, and were equally appreciative when prisoners built a substantial footbridge over the Nairn River.¹² While not a large waterway, conditions at the mouth were extremely dangerous during floods or spring tides.¹³ Outlying areas were often inaccessible, with impassable “road-tracks” and rivers swollen by rain.¹⁴ As new settlers took up leases on distant sheep runs, there was a greater impetus to create reliable land links.¹⁵ Prison gangs worked throughout the island, as far afield as Wharekauri and Kaingaroa, cutting tracks and improving safety along swampy thoroughfares.¹⁶ These small refinements were welcome, but overall, did little to alleviate mobility problems. In August 1867, when the Chatham Island guard organised a ball for the Pākehā settlers, wet weather and poor roads prevented most from attending.¹⁷ The following year, under the leadership of Te Kooti, the prisoners commandeered *Rifleman* and escaped to New Zealand.¹⁸ This was a traumatic experience for those involved, and islanders were determined to turn it to their own advantage. A number of horses were put up for sale, “the property of gentlemen absent without leave”.¹⁹ This raised £5 10s 6d to help fund improvements to island pathways.²⁰

At that time, the first Government survey was taking place. Secure property rights were important to British settlers in New Zealand, but the Crown owned virtually no land in the Chatham Islands, and few Pākehā succeeded in purchasing land from

¹¹ “Chatham Islands”, *Wellington Independent*, 28 February 1867. According to David Holmes, the RM had the prisoners construct approximately one mile of paved roadway about 10 feet wide, from the ford at the Nairn River to his residence at Tikitiki. A few traces of this road remained in 1922.

¹² “Chatham Islands,” *Wellington Independent*, 18 April 1867. “Chatham Islands,” *HBH*, 2 March 1867. Māori named this river Manutukurewa, and Nairn was the name given by the Reverend Hanson of the New Zealand Company. It is generally referred to locally as the Waitangi River.

¹³ “Chatham Islands,” *HBH*, 2 March 1867.

¹⁴ “The Chatham Islands,” *Daily Southern Cross*, 23 July 1866. Most were small streams but became hazardous when swollen by rain. Only two, the Waitangi and Te Awainanga, are considered rivers.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ “Chatham Islands,” *HBH*, 27 April 1867.

¹⁷ “Chatham Islands,” *HBH*, 3 December 1867.

¹⁸ *Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki* fought on the government side in the New Zealand Wars and was charged, with espionage before being transported to the Chatham Islands. See Judith Binney, *Redemption Songs: A Life of Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki*, Auckland University Press, 1995.

¹⁹ “Chatham Islands,” *HBH*, 19 September 1868.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Māori.²¹ Between 1868 and 1870, surveyor S. Percy Smith and his team legally defined blocks of land Pākehā leased from Māori.²² These properties were gradually enclosed by boundary fences, but by necessity, people continued to travel from place to place by going through one another's land.²³ Gateways were placed across existing thoroughfares, one for riders, and often with another larger opening for stock and teams. In winter, these convergences turned to ponds or bogs, and those forced to find an alternative route often neglected to close gates. Some exasperated landowners fenced the roadway on both sides to keep travellers to one defined path. However, this only resulted in quagmires, and the prime users were forced to pool resources, to effect improvements such as culverts and drains; in this way, a defined pathway was made passable for a time.²⁴

In March 1882, the Surveyor General of New Zealand commissioned John Robertson to delineate roads.²⁵ These were something of an afterthought, as these were not considered during the earlier survey. Robertson had worked in remoter parts of Stewart Island, and was a hardy individual, accustomed to rough terrain.²⁶ He spent over nine months on Chatham Island, where he enjoyed few calm days; in fact, during his stay "a record was kept", and over a six month period, there were only two or three spells of twenty-four hours without rain.²⁷ Robertson's summary of island roads was brief; "there are no made roads, as no wheel traffic is carried on with the different parts of the island".²⁸ Only horse tracks led to scattered homesteads, and these were all strategically situated on the coast in the vicinity of a boat harbour.²⁹

Robertson described a journey from Waitangi to Te Whakuru in the north, to give some impression of the tracks used when travelling. Island beaches served as highways, where riders moved at pace and made up time before rougher terrain ahead. To ensure a firm surface, journeys were ideally planned to coincide with low tide. Two miles of

²¹ Jonathan West, "Owning the Otago Peninsula: The Role of Property in Shaping Economy, Society and Environment, 1844 -1900," *New Zealand Journal of History* 46, no. 1 (2012): 59; "The Chatham Islands," *SR*, 24 January 1902. Insecurity of tenure often discouraged Pākehā settlers from investing in long-term improvements. The Crown owned only 20 acres on Chatham Island in the nineteenth century.

²² David Holmes, *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.* 109

²⁵ John A. Robertson, "Chatham Islands," in *Proceedings and Transactions of the Queensland Branch of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, Queensland* (Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, Queensland, 1889), 72.

²⁶ "Obituary," *Manawatu Standard*, 3 July 1911.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 89.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 72. The sequence of these words implies that islanders chose to have no wheeled traffic. A more accurate interpretation might be that there was no wheeled traffic because there were no roads.

²⁹ Robertson, 88.

“splendid” beach on the shores of Petrie Bay took the rider north from the township.³⁰ After tracking inland across low sand hills, the path meandered several miles through bush and clearings. Conditions underfoot changed considerably on reaching the “clears”.³¹ Two types were defined.³² Fern clears proved reasonable all-weather routes, while swamp clears were negotiable only in summer or dry conditions.³³ Speed was often limited to a walk in these areas, and riders might need to dismount and lead the horse over poorer sections.³⁴

Te Whanga Lagoon presented a major obstacle to the northbound traveler. Negotiating this vast expanse of water held its own challenges. The shoreline was treacherously slippery and boggy in places; at times, the firmest path was in the lake itself. Riding nearly seven miles, both in and out of the water, the traveler finally reached a shallow section where it was possible to ford the lagoon. This crossing was over four miles long, and in normal conditions, from one to three feet deep. This served as the main thoroughfare, but even Robertson admitted to some discomfort. “On a cold day”, he wrote, “with a strong south-wester blowing, it was something to remember”. He found this the most “disagreeable” part of the journey, but once completed, only a line of sand-hills separated the rider from the shores of Hanson Bay. The remainder of the journey to Te Whakuru was made on the beach.³⁵

During the same period, the Reverend Philip Anderson of Christchurch visited the Anglican community, and conducted services of baptism and worship throughout the island. As an “old colonist”, with experience of pioneer life, Anderson was confident he could cope with local conditions.³⁶ Unfortunately, his entire stay was marred by atrocious weather, and a record series of gales and rain soon dampened his optimistic outlook.³⁷ Anderson’s travel experiences inspired some graphic accounts. The island was “of the boggiest description” he had ever encountered; and the swamps, “of which I had heard so much, I saw, and *felt* too, to my heart’s content, and beyond it”. These were

³⁰ Ibid., 88-89.

³¹ Ibid., 89.

³² Tarahinau is commonly known as tree heath or Chatham Island grass tree.

³³ Rhys Richards, “An Historical Geography of Chatham Island” (MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, New Zealand, 1962), 66. In later years, this term was applied to all peat areas once covered by tarahinau.

³⁴ Robertson, 89.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ “The Chatham Islands,” AS, 5 October 1882. Philip Cuthbert Anderson, *The Chatham Islands: With Notes of a Visit There in the Months July, August, and September, 1882* (Christchurch, N.Z.: A. Turner, 1882), 3. Reverend Anderson arrived in July 1882 and spent over two months in the islands. Anderson is not related to the author.

³⁷ Ibid.

different from swamps in New Zealand, not overgrown with raupo (*Typha angustifolia*), but open enough to allow the sun and wind to dry them out.³⁸ But at this time the whole island was “like a wet sponge ... everywhere — on hill tops and hill-sides, on flats and in valleys — were these interminable bogs.”³⁹ It was their sheer expanse that made them formidable.

Like many other visitors, Anderson found the first part of the journey north from Waitangi “decidedly pretty”, with “plenty of grass and native trees”.⁴⁰ Tracks through bush and grassy clearings were pleasant to the eye, but in places, the surface was surprisingly slippery. Anderson found these far superior to the hill tracks; “I say tracks”, he wrote, “for roads there are none”. Hampered by ecclesiastical equipment, his party made slow progress over poorer terrain. Having negotiated the boggy clears, Anderson found the shores of Te Whanga Lagoon “safe enough”, but riding at times in water up to the horse’s girth was “damp, cold work”.⁴¹ Nevertheless, he covered some long distances in a day. On one fine day he travelled from Te Whakuru to “Whangamarino”, a distance of about 40 miles.⁴² Accompanied by Robert Shand, a seasoned island traveler and guide, they expected to easily reach their destination before dark. The first 25 miles along the beach to Owenga should have been easy going, but an especially high tide forced them higher into soft sand. This was harder on the horse’s legs, and more tiring, and slowed the pace considerably.

Leaving Owenga, the inland portion of the journey presented the most challenges. Three formidable creeks stood in their path, “the like of which in winter I never wish to cross again, to say nothing of swamps”, wrote Anderson. They crossed the Mangahou Creek at a rapid, with boulders sufficiently slippery and awash to send the horses sprawling. The next obstacle was a nameless boggy creek, “compared with which Bunyan’s Slough of Despond was a pure and limpid stream”.⁴³ These “abominations” and more were repeated at the Te Awainanga River. There was only one narrow exit point, and as Anderson was buffeted by water up to the seat of the saddle, he expected to be swept downstream with his horse at any moment, “to a dead certainty”. But his mount

³⁸ Ibid., 9. Raupo, also known as bull-rush or swamp-reed, is a common wetland plant of the New Zealand landscape.

³⁹ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 14. Elsewhere the Te One area is described as “English” in appearance.

⁴¹ Ibid., 8, 9.

⁴² “Whangamarino” was the farming property owned by Felix Cox and Alexander Shand, situated about 5 kilometres from Waitangi.

⁴³ The Slough of Despond, also known as the Swamp of Despair, appears in John Bunyan’s allegory “Pilgrim’s Progress”, published in 1678. Burdened by the weight of sin and guilt, the Christian protagonist sinks into this deep bog.

kept its feet and took him safely up the steep bank on the other side.⁴⁴ On another occasion, Anderson travelled from Waitangi to Te One with Samuel Deighton, RM. As the dray lumbered through two feet of mud, Anderson remarked how “heavy” the road was. Deighton replied that he had recently metalled that stretch, and an incredulous Anderson said he would have to take his word for it. Many of the settlers apologised to the vicar for the state of the roads, “till at last I said that since leaving New Zealand I had not seen any *roads*, good, bad or indifferent”.⁴⁵ “And what is worse”, he wrote, “I fear that roads there never will be, because there is but little stone on the island, and certainly not sufficient for metalling”.⁴⁶

No roads as such

Reverend Anderson, and many who came after him, saw nothing there that conformed to their understanding of the term “road”. The word simply did not apply in this context. To most, “road” implied an open way, a hard, flat surface, smoothed or paved, to enable the passage of people, vehicles, and animals from one place to another. As island-born Maud Seymour stated, “roads”, as known by New Zealanders, did not exist” in the Chathams. The closest versions were well-worn tracks, reduced to a sea of thick mud after rain, and to deep ruts that set like concrete when dry.⁴⁷ Often, a “road” was a mere horse track through fern and scrub, and extensive areas had no beaten track to follow.⁴⁸ Strangers had difficulty finding their way, and the uninitiated were not encouraged to walk or ride about the island without a guide.⁴⁹ Not only did they risk getting lost, but also becoming engulfed in concealed swamps. While presenting the “appearance of hard soil”, they would “take a man up to his middle in an instant”.⁵⁰ Innocent-looking valleys and depressions appeared easy to cross, but horses often foundered to the girth or deeper in “treacherous hidden swamps”.⁵¹

⁴⁴ Anderson, 18.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 13-14.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁷ Fiona Holmes, *Chatham Islands Rekohu, 1791-1984* (Waitangi, Chatham Islands: F. Holmes, 1984), 59.

⁴⁸ Maud Ella Seymour, “A History of the Chatham Islands” (M.A., University of New Zealand, 1924), 75.

“Down at the Chathams,” *Southland Times* (hereafter *ST*), 25 July 1901.

⁴⁹ Papers Relative to Prisoners and Guard at Chatham Islands, *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives* (hereafter *AJHR*), 1 January 1868, A-15e, p. 3, National Library of New Zealand. “Down at the Chathams,” *ST*, 25 July 1901.

⁵⁰ *AJHR*, 1868, A-15e, p. 13.

⁵¹ Seymour, 75. Department of Conservation, “Chatham Islands Wetlands,” New Zealand Government, accessed August 15, 2016, <http://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/habitats/wetlands/wetlands-by-region/chatham-islands/>.

One early visitor attested to the dangers of travelling on foot. In January 1864, the French whaling ship *Le Gustave* put into Waitangi for provisions. The ship's surgeon, Dr Louis Thiercelin, took every opportunity to acquaint himself with the island and its people. A man in his fifties, Thiercelin left detailed and often humorous accounts of his time there. In describing a personal encounter with a Chatham Island bog, he vividly expresses the sensory nature of the experience. An avid hunter, he was intent on shooting wild fowl to supplement the ship's "cuisine", and on one occasion, in the company of a ship's officer, was walking through open marshland.⁵² Well aware of the imminent danger of falling into a swamp, he delicately negotiated the slippery grass underfoot.⁵³ All was well, until he was caught up in the excitement of pursuing a wounded duck. He ran forward, and within an instant,

Both my feet slipped away at the same time and disappeared into the quagmire; my legs, thighs, body and everything followed the same course, and I might have gone through the globe, with a speed accelerating in direct ratio to the square of the distance covered, and found myself in the antipodes of Chatam [sic] that is about southern France, had I not instinctively spread out my arms. My sudden "transglobal" transit came to a standstill; I painfully leaned right and left on the little mounds above the water: my arms, wrists, nails and even my rifle were used for support and levers. While I was wading through with the energy of a man about to drown, I felt as if long snakes were wrapping themselves around my legs trying to drag me down into the abyss. Beads of perspiration started on my forehead; I cried out and in a last effort I thought I would never be capable of, I found myself squatting on a hillock covered with reeds and water-lilies while the reptiles were nothing more than eels. Dripping wet, covered with smelly black slime, I breathed at last.⁵⁴

Once on firmer ground, Thiercelin removed the slimy layer that enveloped him "like a coat". On reflection, he ruefully concluded that crossing the marsh no longer held any fear, for he now "knew its most secret depths".⁵⁵ The shoreline of Te Whanga Lagoon was also waterlogged and muddy, and the hunters "risked" themselves "through that kind of sewer where every footstep set on the ground released whiffs of stinking gas and black water which stuck to our clothes". Thiercelin likened their passage to "the way the

⁵² Louis Thiercelin, *Travels in Oceania: Memoirs of a Whaling Ship's Doctor*, ed. Christiane Mortelier (Dunedin, N.Z.: University of Otago Press, 1995), 107.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 111. Many ancient cultures believed in a netherworld or underworld, a hellish place where damned souls were condemned to suffer. This was often believed to be underground, only a short distance from the earth's surface.

Ancients imagined the approaches to the nether world”, and grew very anxious when they lost their way in dense woodland.⁵⁶ Thiercelin’s repeated references to the underworld convey his perceptions of an unearthly environment, a sinister, dark, and wretched space from whose ungodly depths he might never return.

In January 1892, Henry Forbes, director of the Canterbury Museum, spent some time on the island.⁵⁷ To his inexperienced eye, there were no apparent obstacles to travelling in a straight line, yet, when following his guide, “we veered to all points of the compass and were constantly wandering widely from the direction of our destination to escape being bogged”.⁵⁸ This highlighted the risks of travelling alone, even in the summer months, and Forbes happily accepted the company of one well-acquainted with the terrain.⁵⁹ The indirect nature of moving from place to place significantly increased travelling times, as did the need to constantly dismount. The Reverend Croasdaile Bowen of Christchurch, the son of an Irish gentleman, spent five weeks in the Chathams in 1874. He intended to visit every family on the island, and toward the end of March he rode out to the north west.⁶⁰ Traversing hillsides saturated by recent rain, his journey was hampered by “immense” bogs and swamps that forced him to dismount and lead the horse. He discovered the treacherous nature of the Chatham Island peat bog, one very different from those he knew. “Its Irish relative”, he wrote, was “a good honest bog, which to see is to be forewarned of its danger”. By comparison, the Chatham version was a “very deceptive, insinuating bog, often presenting to the eye a fair and inviting exterior of smooth green sward upon which, if you are rash enough to venture, you are pretty sure to be engulfed both horse and rider.”⁶¹

In fact, the bogs of Ireland and the Chathams share many characteristics. Blanket bogs of this type are a rare habitat globally, and are only found in cool, wet, typically oceanic climates.⁶² On Chatham Island, peat formed a continuous blanket over the northern plains and southern tableland, in layers up to 10 metres deep, and the extent of

⁵⁶ Ibid., 109, 11.

⁵⁷ Henry O. Forbes, “The Chatham Islands and Their Story,” in *The Fortnightly Review* (Chapman and Hall, 1893), 683. Henry Ogg Forbes was a Scottish explorer, ornithologist, and botanist. He was the director of the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch from 1890 to 1893.

⁵⁸ Ibid. This applied particularly to the southern tablelands.

⁵⁹ Ibid. Forbes’ guide was William Hawkins, an ornithologist and well-known Chatham Island collector who happened to be on the island at that time.

⁶⁰ “Obituary,” *SR*, 4 January 1890; “Diocesan Synod,” *SR*, 22 October 1874; Reverend Croasdaile Bowen, Account of a visit to the Chatham Islands, 1874, Pattisson, Hoel Thornthwaite, Papers, MS-Papers-9665-2, ATL. Bowen was the first Church of England clergyman to visit since Bishop Selwyn 17 years earlier.

⁶¹ Bowen, 30.

⁶² “Peat Bogs,” Scottish National Heritage, accessed January 12, 2018, <http://www.snh.gov.uk/about-scotlands-nature/habitats-and-ecosystems/mountains-heaths-and-bogs/peat-bogs/>.

this geographical feature is largely responsible for the island's unique character.⁶³ Occupying over 60% of the land area, proportionally, these peatlands are more extensive than their Irish or Scottish counterparts.⁶⁴ Due to generally flat terrain and poor drainage, these maintain an extremely high water content.⁶⁵ Where deeper layers of peat accumulate, the "spongey under-mass" develops the discrete convex-shaped domes peculiar to "raised bogs".⁶⁶ This process is consistent with blanket bogs worldwide, but as Bowen observed, the distinguishing feature of the Chatham bog is deceptive vegetation. In this case, the surface is covered with *Sporadanthus traversii*, or bamboo rush, and several other grass-like species.⁶⁷ Another troublesome obstacle is the basin bog, which occurs in small, isolated patches where groundwater accumulates from adjacent high ground.⁶⁸ Although peatlands predominate, wetlands also include soils of silt or sand, and these variations give rise to a range of distinct wetland types.⁶⁹ Succinctly put, most of Chatham Island is wet and swampy, many bogs are of a considerable size, and these are present on both low and high ground.⁷⁰ Bogs at altitude are considered a "curious feature" of the island, and are attributed to higher rainfall and lower precipitation, due to the characteristic mists and fog of Rēkohu.⁷¹

In 1901, James Grove of Wellington was surprised to find Chatham Islanders still reaching their destination by crossing one another's lands.⁷² This would be unacceptable to land-owners in New Zealand, where roads were laid out to respect

⁶³ Richards, 9. Hamish Campbell, "Geology," in *The Chatham Islands: Heritage and Conservation* (Christchurch, New Zealand: Canterbury University Press in association with the Dept. of Conservation, 1996), 44.

⁶⁴ Richards, 9. About 17% of Ireland's land area in bog land, and 23% of the Scottish uplands are comprised of blanket bog.

⁶⁵ Leonard Cockayne, "A Short Account of the Plant-Covering of Chatham Island," *Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New Zealand*. 34 (1901): 247-49.

⁶⁶ Richards, 9. "Blanket Mires," Landcare Research: Manaaki Whenua, accessed August 15, 2016, <http://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/publications/factsheets/rare-ecosystems/wetlands/blanket-mires>; "Chatham Islands Wetlands," Department of Conservation: Te Papa Atawhai, accessed August 15, 2016, <http://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/habitats/wetlands/wetlands-by-region/chatham-islands/>.

⁶⁷ "Blanket Mires"; "Chatham Islands Wetlands"; J. Dawson, *Forest Vines to Snow Tussocks: The Story of New Zealand Plants* (Victoria University Press, 1988), 215. Leonard Cockayne, *The Vegetation of New Zealand*, 2 ed. (London: Hafner Publishing Company, 1958), 329. <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-CocVege-t1-body1-d2-d4-d2.html>. *Sporadanthus traversii* is endemic to the Chatham Islands, and these are defined as restiad bogs. This type of bog is more extensively developed in New Zealand than in other parts of the world. These are the equivalent of the sphagnum bog in the Northern hemisphere.

⁶⁸ Richards, 9.

⁶⁹ "Chatham Islands Wetlands". Wetland types include infertile bogs, fertile swamps, fens, seepages, marshes, dune lakes, peat lakes, ponds, and streams.

⁷⁰ Cockayne, "A Short Account of the Plant-Covering of Chatham Island," 247.

⁷¹ A.W.B. Powell, "Eastward Lie the Chathams," *AS*, 3 June 1939.

⁷² "Down at the Chathams," *ST*, 25 July 1901. By 1907 there was ten miles of fenced thoroughfare close to Waitangi, but no metalled surface.

private property.⁷³ There were no impediments to this policy, however, as the Crown held title to the entire colony, and English land laws applied.⁷⁴ The process of partitioning property went hand in hand with allowances for a hypothetical network of roads, for ease of access and transportation.⁷⁵ On some areas of “broken topography” it was not always possible to project rigid geometric gridlines onto the landscape; nevertheless, there and elsewhere, the passage of people through the countryside was generally dictated by the rights of private land owners.⁷⁶ Travellers were constrained to paths that did not necessarily follow the natural contours of the land, and were often denied access to shorter, less physically demanding or safer routes.⁷⁷ Conditions dictated otherwise in the Chathams.

In spite of inhospitable terrain, the road allowances surveyed throughout Chatham Island appear to have observed these privacy criteria. According to Holmes, these paper roads ran through dangerous areas of bog and peat, where a considerable amount of work and expense would be required to form a durable and firm base.⁷⁸ Given small population, lack of materials, and limited revenue, Anderson’s gloomy predictions that there would never be any roads were merited. Roads simply did not eventuate, and travellers had no alternative but to choose the safest, most effective path, wherever that might lead, otherwise movement would have been impossible.⁷⁹ Road improvements were generally limited to superficial and essential modifications.⁸⁰ Settlers laid sand where this was accessible, and minor bridging was attempted with “corduroys”, or logs laid horizontally, side by side across troublesome areas of bog or creek. This was a common practice throughout New Zealand, but as there were no large trees on Chatham Island, smaller pieces of wood often had to suffice.⁸¹ When the Reverend Edgar Wyatt visited in 1886, he was unimpressed with the Chatham version of this technology. However, he noted the effectiveness of this “ingenious device for facilitating

⁷³ Joy Parr, *Sensing Changes: Technologies, Environments, and the Everyday, 1953-2003*, ed. Jon Van der Veen (Vancouver: UBC Press, University of British Columbia, 2010), 18.

⁷⁴ Jonathan Lewis West, “An Environmental History of the Otago Peninsula: Dialectics of Ecological and Cultural Change from First Settlement to 1900 (PhD Diss., University of Otago, 2009), 59.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 19, 245.

⁷⁶ West, 61.

⁷⁷ Parr, 18.

⁷⁸ David Holmes, *My Seventy Years*, 109. According to Holmes, roads were surveyed in 1882 and 1902.

⁷⁹ This statement is based on personal experience traveling by Land Rover in 1967 and negotiating peat fires and bogs on Chatham Island.

⁸⁰ David Holmes, *ibid.*, 110.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

locomotion". "Your horse steps on it", he wrote, and as "one piece of wood flies up and hits him; he lifts his hind legs; and you cross the creek hurriedly".⁸²

Edward Chudleigh farmed Wharekauri Station for 46 years, and his final days on the island in July 1912 speak volumes about the prolonged difficulties of movement. Now 70 years of age, Chudleigh had witnessed few improvements to roads during his time there. His household effects were carted some 25 miles to Waitangi for shipment to New Zealand, and this was still a major undertaking. To make this journey, a number of experienced teamsters were employed, and 17 horses worked at any one time. Two large sledges were drawn by six and four horse teams, and drays by four and three horses. The vehicles travelled in convoy and a spare team of horses was included. With a strong sense of inevitability, Chudleigh reasoned that concentrated skills and extra horse-power would ensure a bogged team could be got out more quickly. He described the whole process as "a truly stupendous job ... only horses born and reared on bogland could negotiate the road".⁸³ By road, he referred to extensive swampy clears, bogs, unbridged creeks, sodden bush tracks, and finally, the welcome stretch of beach leading to Waitangi.

But even in the township there were no formed roads. Islanders might walk about during dry weather, but in winter, horse traffic turned clay thoroughfares into vast expanses of mud up to two feet deep.⁸⁴ Pedestrians avoided the tracks, or else waded through red mud over the top of their boots.⁸⁵ The soil type in this area is known locally as "red clay", and as one newspaper correspondent quipped, in its semi-liquid state, it "sticketh closer than a brother".⁸⁶ Residents seldom ventured out in these conditions, and those who carted goods found their work harsh and difficult.⁸⁷ Chudleigh experienced these conditions at their worst in 1912, and his diary account suggests that winter conditions took a heavy toll on the morale of local residents.⁸⁸ One winter evening, after visiting friends at Te One, he was offered a ride back to his

⁸² Lyndsay Head, draft copy of "The Island World of Thomas Ritchie", Michael King Research Notes relating to Thomas William Ritchie, 97-042-07/12, ATL.

⁸³ E. R. Chudleigh, *Diary of E.R. Chudleigh, 1862-1921: Chatham Islands*, ed. Eva Carlisle Richards (Christchurch: Simpson and Williams, 1950), 458.

⁸⁴ David Holmes, *ibid.*, 24.

⁸⁵ "Our Chatham Islands Letter," *WA*, 18 August 1906.

⁸⁶ Cockayne, *The Vegetation of New Zealand*, 329. These red tuffs resulted from the weathering of volcanic rock. "Our Chatham Islands Letter", *WA*, 18 August 1906. According to Rhys Richards, Waitangi is one of several localities where this soil type is found. Volcanic soils make up 16% of the total stable land, and soils from basic tuffs are common in the south and central north.

⁸⁷ "At the Chathams," *Manawatu Times* 24 July 1913.

⁸⁸ Richards, 91.



Figure 5: Bringing cattle into Waitangi for shipping to New Zealand c. 1937. Note the sea of mud in the foreground, the same stretch Chudleigh struggled through in 1912. William B. Burt, private collection of Bryce Shirtcliffe.

accommodation house in Waitangi. The driver crossed the river with some difficulty, only to find it impossible to complete the journey. Deep mud had rendered the cutting leading up to the township impassable to wheeled vehicles. Chudleigh struggled on alone, and it took him over ten minutes to walk 40 metres. He arrived “a mass of mud” and was glad to climb into bed.⁸⁹ His mood was little improved by morning, when he wrote “I got an early start from Waitangi considering it was Waitangi where no one gets up before she or he can help it”.⁹⁰ Evidently, Chudleigh was not the only one who found these conditions trying and exhausting. His words suggest these conditions induced a widespread lethargy akin to depression.⁹¹ Chudleigh was thankful, nevertheless, that various people were out and about that morning to pilot him through the “many quagmires”. Many years would elapse before the residents of Waitangi were treated to solid thoroughfares (Figure 5).

Transport options

When the Reverend Charles Fraer arrived in 1913, he was at once struck by the considerable number of saddle horses on Chatham Island. He soon realised these were

⁸⁹ Chudleigh, 459.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 460.

⁹¹ This general lethargy is discussed in greater depth later in this chapter.

the “vehicles of the islands”, the only means of locomotion. The people would be “very badly off” without their friend the horse.⁹² To newcomers, it seemed that everyone rode, in fact, half the population appeared to live on horseback.⁹³ Fraer observed men, women, and children riding “furiously”, and to his amusement, was “challenged to a race by a little urchin whose swarthy legs barely reached more than across the saddle”. He watched in astonishment as a young mother rode effortlessly past at a hand gallop, “carrying a child at her breast, sitting her horse splendidly”.⁹⁴ As visitors were also wholly dependent on the horse, a certain level of fitness and competency was required. Those unable to walk or ride any distance were discouraged from going there, and older people who made “a habit of falling off” were advised to stay away.⁹⁵ As one journalist explained, those who are too ill, too young, or too old to ride must simply stay at home.⁹⁶



Figure 6: Caught by the tide. Unloading a “stalled” dray carting cheese to Waitangi from the factory at Te One c. 1936. William B. Burt, private collection of Bryce Shirtcliffe.

⁹² “Life in the Chathams”, *PR*, 25 March 1913.

⁹³ “The Chatham Islands”, *PR*, 25 April 1903.

⁹⁴ “Life in the Chathams”, *PR*, 25 March 1913.

⁹⁵ “Paradise for Sportsmen”, *New Zealand Freelance*, 19 May 1937.

⁹⁶ Life on the Chatham Islands: Talk by Frank Simpson 1956, Ref 22010, https://www.ngataonga.org.nz/collections/catalogue/catalogue-item?record_id=208953.

When conditions permitted, an array of drays, traps and bullock-carts were used in localised areas, but the island was certainly not the place for fashionable gigs (figure 6).⁹⁷ In the late 1880s, the Moore family at Moreroa owned a superior class of cart by island standards, and Sophie Moore told family in New Zealand that, “down here it is much admired ... but then it only has two old spring carts as rivals”.⁹⁸ The family were fond of their conveyance, and even gave it the pet name “Jack”. When making plans to leave the island, they considered packing it up with their possessions and taking it with them. But Sophie knew they would never use it again, as on the mainland, they would never wish to be seen “in such an ugly looking thing”.⁹⁹

Out of necessity, most Chatham Islanders were not too proud to use “primitive” modes of transport, types of vehicles relied on well into the twentieth century.¹⁰⁰ While the horse remained significant, on occasion newcomers were forced to adopt antiquated cartage methods.¹⁰¹ In 1908, Henry Skey and Edward Kidson completed the Magnetic Survey of New Zealand, and over two months, established twenty observation stations at regular intervals throughout Chatham Island. Skey reported difficulties in accessing suitable points, and the need to “fall back” on local forms of transport to carry equipment over tough terrain.¹⁰² Setting off with a small horse-drawn sledge, the nature of the “so-called roads” soon became obvious, and the men returned for a third horse. While their cargo was not excessively heavy, it was delicate, and greater horse-power helped ease the sledge’s passage. Navigation was difficult and confusing, as “the road to a place can be taken only as the general direction, there are so many by-paths”. The seasonal nature of the tracks was problematic; thoroughfares used at one time of year were impassable at another, and without a guide, newcomers were unaware of the best route. The surveyors discovered many traps for the uninitiated, including “absolutely

⁹⁷ Fiona Holmes, 59; “Chatham Island,” *EP*, 20 July 1901.

⁹⁸ Sophia Moore to Poll, 7 July 1890, MS-Papers-10850, Moore Letters, ATL. Sophia, known as Sophie, and Francis Moore farmed Moreroa Station. Some of the island’s better thoroughfares were between Waitangi and Moreroa.

⁹⁹ Sophia Moore to ‘Poll’, 7 July 1890.

¹⁰⁰ Richards, 91; “Chatham Island Notes,” *PR*, 21 March 1924.

¹⁰¹ “Life in the Chathams,” *PR*, 25 March 1913.

¹⁰² “A Scientist’s Visit,” *SR*, 23 May 1908. The Magnetic Survey improved knowledge of magnetic elements in southern latitudes. The Department of Lands and Survey began a systematic survey of the magnetic field in 1899, establishing 334 magnetic stations throughout New Zealand. The work was expected to make a valuable contribution to new charts being issued to the Admiralty. In 1904, Henry Fawsitt Skey of Otago University took full responsibility for the work, and the Chatham Islands were the final region to be surveyed. Edward Kidson was a New Zealander who had recently joined the staff of the Department of Terrestrial Magnetism of the Carnegie Institution of Washington. He later became the Dominion Meteorologist for the New Zealand Meteorological Service.

the worst swamp” at Awatapu, some 960 feet above sea level.¹⁰³ Unexpected encounters of this kind severely tested the resolve of many travellers.

Skey offers no further description of the borrowed conveyance so crucial to completing the project, but various forms of sledge were in use on the island. The most popular and practical was the “Chatham Island Truck”, or konāke.¹⁰⁴ This island contraption was far from elegant, but nothing could equal its capabilities in carrying passengers and cargo over varied terrain.¹⁰⁵ With few tradesmen to call on, islanders were adept at helping themselves, and the humble konāke was adapted to suit different-sized loads and ground conditions.¹⁰⁶ Grove described this as “a sledge in the front half and a truck in the back half, having skates at the front and a pair of low truck wheels at the rear”.¹⁰⁷ The wheels were made of iron, wood or rubber, and were drawn by two to three horses, or by bullocks.¹⁰⁸

Skilfully loaded, the flat wooden deck could carry up to a ton and a half in weight, and the driver sat on top. In 1901, Grove saw many konāke in use, moving along “merrily and quickly” and overcoming all obstacles.¹⁰⁹ Others noted the skill required to operate them, as they had no shafts, pole brakes or steering gear. Some newcomers were amused by the islands “universal conveyance”, one describing it as “a low trolley”, with a body resembling “nothing so much as an Eskimo reindeer sledge”. As it stood only eighteen inches from the ground, “you have not far to fall, at any rate.”¹¹⁰ Amusing or otherwise, a census of vehicles in 1941 showed the konāke was the most commonly used vehicle on the island, with up to 40 in regular use on farm and “road” (figures 7 and 8).¹¹¹

¹⁰³ “The Magnetic Survey,” *PR*, 22 May 1908.

¹⁰⁴ Fiona Holmes, *ibid.*, 59. Although some Chatham Islanders claim the konāke as an island invention, similar sledges were used in steep hill country, bush, and swamp areas of the North Island. According to Thomas Kendall’s “A Grammar and Vocabulary of the Language of New Zealand,” 1820, konāke means “a slip with the foot”. In “A Dictionary of the Maori Language”, Herbert W. Williams defines koneke as both a sledge and to slide along. In addition, the variant spelling kōnaki also appears in Edward Tregear’s *Maori-Polynesian Comparative Dictionary* of 1891.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Frank A. Simpson, *Chatham Exiles: Yesterday and Today at the Chatham Islands* (Wellington, N.Z.: Reed, 1950), 139-40. “The Chatham Islands,” *WA*, 26 June 1906.

¹⁰⁷ “Chatham Island,” *EP*, 20 July 1901.

¹⁰⁸ Fiona Holmes, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ “The Chatham Islands,” *AG*, 13 July 1910; “Chatham Island,” *EP*, 20 July 1901.

¹¹⁰ “The Chatham Islands,” *WA*, 26 June 1906.

¹¹¹ W1 1129 41/47 Part 2, 1919-1943, Roads, Wellington Roads District, Chatham Islands Road Works, Wellington, Public Works Department (Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwantanga, National Office, Wellington, Report from Highways Engineer to District Engineer, Ministry of Works, Christchurch, 5 June 1941.



Figure 7: A wedding party on a konāke. *Auckland Weekly News*, 18 December 1913, J. J. Guest.
 Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, AWNS-19131218-48-4.
<http://www.aucklandcity.govt.nz>.



Figure 8: Carting firewood c. 1945. William B. Burt, private collection of Bryce Shirtcliffe.

In 1925, processes were in place to elect the first County Council, and roads were a talking point locally. A ride around the island was still viewed as “an undertaking of considerable magnitude”, but no radical improvements were expected.¹¹² Some felt culverts and drainage on existing, well-used thoroughfares were a priority, but most agreed on the urgent need for more clearly defined tracks in outlying districts, to prevent the common occurrence of travellers losing their way. This was a thoroughly unpleasant experience in boggy country, and even a small deviation could lead to difficulties. A clergyman and his wife had recently “missed” the track when travelling in the north. Faced with the prospect of camping in the open overnight, they had struggled on with considerable difficulty and strain, until eventually finding “human habitation”.¹¹³

In 1892, John M. Thompson, a Christchurch musician and piano-tuner, found himself in a similar situation.¹¹⁴ On a second visit, he set out without a guide to ride the 14 miles from Maunganui to Wharekauri. Out on the clears, the well-laden horse “got into a bit of swamp”. As it exerted to get free, the girth on the saddle broke, and horse and rider parted company. Unfortunately, Thompson’s saddlery and packing arrangements caused further complications. The horse galloped off into “the rays of the setting sun” with the saddle bounding behind him, leaving the remainder of its burden behind. With “a heavy heart and a heavy load”, Thompson continued on foot until he lost the track in the dark. Even a promising moonrise cast confusing shadows, not to mention doubt over where to go next. “I didn’t know the road”, he wrote, so “consequently travelled about four times the distance”. Exhausted, by 10 p.m. he was resolved to spending a night in the fern. His one last hope was to “try a coo-ee”. He was never so glad to receive a response, and to find Chudleighs’ homestead nearby.¹¹⁵

Even long-term residents lost their way on occasion, especially when riding in the dark.¹¹⁶ This was not the intention of Kaingaroa farmer Thomas Ritchie on New Year’s Eve 1866, when he and two local travel companions set off to Waitangi. While crossing the lagoon, Ritchie’s horse suddenly sickened, lay down and died. A rider returned some ten miles for another horse, but due to the delay, by nightfall they were entering an area of dense bush. Conditions worsened with heavy rain, and Ritchie was forced to

¹¹² “A Lonely Outpost,” *EP*, 17 March 1917 “Chatham Island Notes,” *PR*, 24 February 1925.

¹¹³ “Chatham Island Notes,” *PR*, 24 February 1925.

¹¹⁴ “Music Teachers,” in *The Cyclopaedia of New Zealand* (Christchurch: The Cyclopaedia Company Limited, 1903), 227.

¹¹⁵ “A Second Visit to Chatham Islands,” *PR*, 17 February 1892. A ‘coo-ee’ is an Australasian call used to attract attention, particularly in the bush. ‘Within coo-ee’ means within earshot.

¹¹⁶ Bowen, 32.

dismount to better determine the path. The men were constantly separated and reunited in the pitch darkness, and the sounds of “coo-ee” reverberated through the bush as they wandered for hours looking for the right track. In the midst of their troubles, the sound of cannon fire was heard in the distance, as the Government steamer St Kilda, in port at Waitangi, announced the New Year.¹¹⁷

The lagoon crossing was generally considered safe, but it still demanded respect. Higher water levels placed greater stress on horses, especially during colder weather. If mist came in, riders risked drifting off course. Sometimes horses took fright when treading on eels, or stumbled in small holes in the muddy bottom.¹¹⁸ An unseated rider might land in the water, sometimes with tragic consequences. Eventually, poles at intervals marked the ford, but prior to this, riders kept to the path by discerning colour changes in the water. Riders must pay close attention, as two of Ritchie’s workers learnt to their detriment in 1878. The lead rider made a sharp deviation in the path, but the two young men following failed to notice. Horses and riders plunged into four metres of water. Unable to swim, one man panicked, and despite the best efforts of his companions, was thrown from his horse and drowned.¹¹⁹

The alternative route along the shores of Hanson Bay varied according to the state of the lagoon outlet at Te Awapatiki. Ritchie nearly drowned there on two occasions. In 1871, the sea rushed in and engulfed the laden dray. Dashed against rocks, he managed to latch on to the horses, which saved him from being carried out to sea with the backwash. Two years later, on a bitterly cold winter’s day, Ritchie and another rowed across the outlet in a canoe, with their horses swimming behind. The canoe was capsized by a wave, and both men were thrown neck-deep into turbulent water. Ritchie only completed the crossing by clinging to his horse, which towed him to safety.¹²⁰

Perhaps the least enviable role on the island was that of the resident doctor. Caring for such a scattered population could be extremely arduous. All visits were made on horseback, and medical men sometimes rode 40 miles or more, only to find, on returning home, that their services were urgently needed at the other end of the island. In 1923, Medical Officer, Dr Edward Pohau Ellison spent “a cold, miserable night” in the open. Leaving Owenga for Waitangi at 5 p.m., he covered some miles in darkness before

¹¹⁷ Ritchie, Thomas William, *Diary*, Ref # Arch RIT, p. 18, CCLA.

¹¹⁸ A. J. Blakiston, *My Yesteryears* (Timaru, N.Z.: Timaru Herald, 1952), 39, 40. The holes were scooped out by feeding black swans.

¹¹⁹ Head.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

losing the main track. The horse was soon knee-deep in a treacherous swamp, and Ellison dismounted and led it to firmer ground. He stayed put overnight, rather than risk further dangers. Resuming his journey at daybreak, he had to rely on familiar landmarks to guide him in the direction of the main track.¹²¹

Weather wise

Weather strongly influenced the people's safety, comfort, and enjoyment of life, and often dictated daily activities. Chatham Islanders were "weather-wise", and in the same way as indigenous Moriori, their "interests" depended "a great deal on the state of the winds and weather".¹²² Conditions had tangible effects on morale. When Chudleigh returned from New Zealand in August 1876, the entire island resembled one large bog. "One is wet to the ankles all the time", he wrote, and "you must dismount at all the worst swamps".¹²³ The people looked "dragled and unkept in the last degree... as to the mud about Shand and Coxes it is fairly in the house".¹²⁴ Chudleigh was not known for his positive outlook, but even so, the abundance of mud and swamp was "sufficient to induce gloom in any one who lacked good health and cheerful temper".¹²⁵ In July 1890, Sophie Moore told her sister in Taranaki how life changed in winter.

Until a few days ago we have been able to drive in the cart ... the weather has been so fine and consequently the road is quite good. But heavy rain the last two days has, I'm afraid, made it bad for the winter, and it was so nice getting on to the beach and always seemed so good for Phyl and Dorothy.¹²⁶

In winter, local newspaper correspondents often referred to imposed isolation and its effects on island morale. "We have contrived to exist through another winter", wrote one in 1894, and the people were eager for "bright and warm days to make up for our last dose of mud and 'Mari Mari', the Chatham name for influenza".¹²⁷ Sometimes there were only fleeting glimpses of sunlight, seldom enough to induce any sense of comfort

¹²¹ "Sickness on Chathams," *NZH*, 6 October 1923. Ellison served on Niue for four years before going to the Chathams.

¹²² Robertson, 89.

¹²³ Chudleigh, 251.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ "News of the Omaha," *PR*, 14 August 1886.

¹²⁶ Sophia Moore to Poll, 7 July 1890. Phyllis and Dorothy were the eldest children of Sophie and Francis Moore, aged five and four years at that time.

¹²⁷ "Chatham Islands News," *NZH*, 19 October 1894. This illness, and climatic effects on health are the subject of a later chapter.

and warmth. Reports convey the sense of desolation and loneliness among a stoic people who endured months of misery.¹²⁸ This 1906 article concisely encapsulates the sentiments expressed in many published over a long period.

There is little news to tell you now. It is winter, and the roads are bad. You cannot go far without getting over your boots; so people stay at home, and nothing happens worth recording. As summer comes the place dries up a bit, the islanders get about, there are races, sports, shooting matches, and other amusements to gather the scattered families together. Then there will be something for me to write about.¹²⁹

One correspondent pondered the benefits of hibernating entirely for three months, “what a lot of disagreeables we could escape if such a thing were possible ... how much younger we would feel for the remaining nine months of the year”.¹³⁰ The writer appreciated that winter was always a trying time in country places, but considered it especially so in the Chathams, “where the want of roads and bridges preclude any social gatherings that we would like to indulge in, if we could do so without the risk of being drowned in the river, or disappearing in one of our famous bogs”.¹³¹ Another labelled the general inactivity during winter as “our usual stagnant condition”, a malaise that reduced the entire population to a sleep-like state.¹³²

The island lifestyle evolved in response to these conditions, and in many ways defied mainland expectations and norms. As early as 1882, visitors commented on the islands’ arrested modernity, and over time, some outsiders came to view Chatham Island society as dysfunctional and retarded.¹³³ The lack of roads was the focus of growing criticism. For Anderson, the surroundings carried him back “to days long ago in the north of New Zealand, before we had railways and telegraphs”.¹³⁴ Bishop Julius of Christchurch was less polite, directly blaming the lack of progress on the “hold on” policy adopted by the islanders.¹³⁵ He sarcastically quipped how this term was very well-suited, as “one cannot get from Waitangi to any other part of the island whatsoever

¹²⁸ “Chatham Islands,” *NZH*, 19 July 1893; “Chatham Islands,” *NZH*, 16 October 1893; “Chatham Islands,” *PR*, 26 September 1912.

¹²⁹ “Our Chatham Islands Letter,” *WA*, 18 August 1906.

¹³⁰ “Chatham Islands,” *NZH*, 19 July 1893

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² “Chatham Islands,” *SR*, 14 July 1893.

¹³³ Arbuckle, 42.

¹³⁴ Anderson, 13.

¹³⁵ Bishop Julius visited three times over a twenty-one-year period between 1896 and 1917.

on foot without going through eight or nine inches of mud – even that, you see, has the ‘hold on infection’ – unless the tide is low.”¹³⁶

This hint of humour barely conceals the Bishop’s scathing undertones, but some commentary was more tongue in cheek. In 1887, James Garwood, a fifty-five-year-old newspaper correspondent and storekeeper from Akaroa, visited the Chathams out of pure curiosity. Choosing not to ride, he remained with the steamer *Kahu* on her various calls around the coast. Clearly a man of refined tastes, Garwood exuberantly reported the potential dangers to his physical and sensory well-being. At Kaingaroa, Thomas Ritchie sent a bullock dray to the beach, to “chariot” his guest the short distance to the homestead.¹³⁷ Garwood’s sensibilities were somewhat assaulted by this primitive transport, unnerving enough in itself, he complained, without the accompanying bad language of the “coachman”. “More forcible than polite”, he wondered how he was not “extinguished” in the process, by the “language used and the perils of Chatham”.¹³⁸ Humorous this may be, but as these reproachful attitudes were reinforced by others, visitors conveyed an impression of a dangerous, uncivilized place, populated by uncouth and backward people.

Criticism came from within and without, but those not raised to these conditions could be particularly scornful. In 1894, a local correspondent strongly criticised delays in establishing a local body. This late-comer from New Zealand was disgusted by island lethargy, and the general disinterest in public improvements of any sort. “For twenty years past”, he wrote, “they have struggled through the muddy creeks and bogholes that form the chief interest of the tracks that do duty for roads”.¹³⁹ He alluded derisively to the island’s position east of the 180th meridian, pointing out they were actually a day behind the rest of the world, “hence, the natives are born slow and cannot help themselves, and old residents seem to catch the complaint without being aware of it”.¹⁴⁰

The Chatham Islands were declared a county under the Counties Act of 1901, but a County Council was not operative until 1925.¹⁴¹ This process was delayed because the

¹³⁶ “Wanted, a “Boss”. *ODT*, 11 June 1917.

¹³⁷ “James Daniel Garwood,” in *Macdonald Dictionary*, ed. George Ranald Macdonald (Canterbury Museum Online Collections: Canterbury Museum, 1952-1964), accessed November 4, 2018, <https://collection.canterburymuseum.com/persons/10767>; “The Chatham Islands,” *Akaroa Mail and Banks Peninsula Advertiser* (hereafter *AMBA*), 25 January 1887. Garwood, a formerly printer and correspondent with the *Lyttelton Times*, moved to Akaroa and became a storekeeper.

¹³⁸ “The Chatham Islands,” *AMBA*, *ibid*.

¹³⁹ “Chatham Islands News”, *NZH*, 19 October 1894.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*.

¹⁴¹ The Chatham Islands County Act, No. 62, *New Zealand Statutes*, 1901, 239; David Holmes, *My Seventy Years*, 110.

state of the roads made meetings difficult. Meanwhile, the costs of necessary repairs were met by public subscription, and residents offered what they could afford. According to one island farmer, this led to endless disputes and little action.¹⁴² Some desired an equitable levy, collected by a road board, while others believed Māori landowners would oppose these measures. Others were more equable in apportioning blame. New Zealand MP William Steward, who visited in 1902, found Pākehā farmers equally unwilling to fund improvements.¹⁴³ This came as no great surprise, given reliance on wool, and that industry's fluctuating returns. Still, he blamed the settler's attitude. "Not a few", he claimed, "seem to have fallen into the taihoa (wait a bit) habit", so characteristic of their Māori neighbours, "and whose spirit in this and other matters they unconsciously imbibe". Through "want of energy", recent attempts to establish a dairy industry had failed. If this "primitive state" endured, with no rates or taxes of any kind, then "unknown luxuries" such as roads and bridges could never eventuate.¹⁴⁴ It seems Steward put the proverbial 'cart before the horse', as he failed to grasp the principle reason new ventures failed, which was the lack of roads.

The New Zealand Government was fully aware of island deficiencies, but offered little practical assistance.¹⁴⁵ In 1906, Premier Richard Seddon made a short and unexpected visit, to hear the islanders' wants. He listened to their plea for roads, but nothing eventuated.¹⁴⁶ Economic and social progress depended on efficient communication, therefore the future looked grim. With a population of approximately 400, and a landscape "full of peat bogs", islanders could never fund and deliver public works on the scale of those on the mainland.¹⁴⁷ Forty years would elapse before mobility was improved.

Many outsider comments reflect a poor understanding of the island environment. The difference between those termed "instant experts", and those acquainted with

¹⁴² "At the Chathams," *North Otago Times*, 3 January 1916.

¹⁴³ Sir William Jukes Steward was a newspaper proprietor and editor, and a prominent and long-serving MP. He represented the Waimate Electorate for twenty-nine years, and was later appointed to the Legislative Council.

¹⁴⁴ "The Chatham Islands," *SR*, 24 January 1902; "Canterbury News," *NZH*, 27 April 1903. Steward mentioned two bridges on the island at that time, one over the Waitangi River and another at the Mangapai Creek. Several committees were formed to control some aspects of island affairs. A Stock Committee was formed in 1900 to oversee the shipping of stock, and to prevent larger land owners from monopolising shipping space. A Wharf Committee was active from 1902, imposing charges on all exports and imports, and maintaining the wharf facilities. These committees amalgamated about 1907. The Chatham Islands were not included in any electoral district until 1922.

¹⁴⁵ Arbuckle, 9.

¹⁴⁶ "The Premier at the Chathams," *ODT*, 9 April 1906.

¹⁴⁷ "Chatham Island Sheep Trade," *TIM*, 16 March 1904.

island conditions, is evident from two different perspectives, comments based on experiences in the 1920s. A visiting marine biologist cited the lack of roads as a major hindrance to the development of the fishing industry, because even if a suitable wharf was built, fish could not be transported overland. Roads could be made on the Chathams, he claimed, if the people were “sufficiently energetic”.¹⁴⁸ The country was nearly all flat, so surely, no engineering difficulties stood in the way. Compare this to the opinion of Ruth Canter, wife of the Anglican Vicar. Ruth rode all over the island in the 1920s and knew it well, and did not expect mobility would be easily improved. “Man can make superficial changes”, she said, “but to change natural disadvantages is a great problem. The climate, absence of metal, and large tracts of peat bog between the settlements have ever been the bars to transport progress”.¹⁴⁹

Until 1950, three times the normal horse power was required to pull wheeled horse-drawn vehicles, and these were still limited to localised areas. By 1946, eight motor cars bumped and slid along short stretches of muddy thoroughfare, described by one reporter as “the worst motor “roads” in the world”.¹⁵⁰ Even the *konāke* made better time; not surprisingly, in 1946, these continued as the family wagon.¹⁵¹ Horses were still the principal mode of transport, with mothers ‘double banking’ their youngsters, while older children shared ponies.¹⁵² In 1959, outsiders still found travel between distant farms slow and difficult, but this was an accepted reality for islanders wishing to move from place to place; necessary, appropriate and normal.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ Maxwell W. Young, “The Fishing Industry in the Chatham Islands,” *New Zealand Journal of Science and Technology* 6 (1923): 50.

¹⁴⁹ Ruth Canter, “A Brake on Development in the Chatham Islands”, *Auckland Weekly News*, 12 June 1946, 26.

¹⁵⁰ Photo caption, *PR*, 7 June 1946. Enclosure in Burt, William Beverland, 1912-1992, Chatham Islands Collection, Scrapbook - Chatham Island miscellany, MS-Papers-0434-58/1, ATL; “No one has ever gone hungry on Chatham Islands”, newspaper article c. 1946, enclosure in scrapbook, private collection of Robert Weston, Chatham Islands.

¹⁵¹ W1 1129 41/47 Part 2; “No one has ever gone hungry on Chatham Islands”.

¹⁵² Photo caption, *PR*, 7 June 1946.

¹⁵³ A. C. S. Wright, *Soils of Chatham Island (Rekohu)*, ed. New Zealand Department of Scientific and Industrial Research and New Zealand Soil Bureau (Wellington, N.Z.: Dept. of Scientific and Industrial Research, 1959), 9.

World War Two was the catalyst for significant changes in islander mobility.¹⁵⁴ In 1941, the Government enlisted help to establish a flying boat base at Te Whanga Lagoon. Materials were shipped to Waitangi, and after some difficulties in transferring these to the site, a consolidated community effort saw the work completed in two weeks.¹⁵⁵ Men, women and children worked voluntarily, as a contribution to the war effort, and in return, the Government built a substantial bridge over the Te Awainanga River the following year.¹⁵⁶ After the war, the Minister of Internal Affairs, William Parry, flew in for a short visit, and left with the memorable parting wisecrack, “you can’t go on being mud boys all your lives”.¹⁵⁷ In 1947, men and equipment from the New Zealand Public Works Department arrived to build roads within Waitangi, before focusing efforts further afield.¹⁵⁸ This work proved more difficult than anticipated. As roadways were drained, excavated, and filled, the “underworld” claimed some heavy earth-moving machinery, which “vanished in a sponge-like morass of peat bog”.¹⁵⁹ Some unusual methods were called for, and many places required a foundation of interlaced tree trunks laid flat on the ground. Crushed metal was carted great distances, and in some areas, crushed limestone and sea-beach shell had to suffice.¹⁶⁰ After three years, 29 miles of road had been built, and funds were exhausted (map 4). These improvements cost £70,000, derived mostly from a government subsidy; at that time, the annual revenue of the Chatham Island’s County Council amounted to £5000.¹⁶¹

In January 1950, a Solent Flying Boat left Wellington, and cruised eastward over the Pacific at 200 miles an hour. Less than three hours later, the inaugural flight of Tasman Empire Airways new Chatham Islands service landed on Te Whanga Lagoon. Many islanders gathered at the airbase to witness this historic event. People could now

¹⁵⁴ The reality of war came uncomfortably close in November 1940, when the steamer *Holmwood* left Waitangi on its return voyage to Lyttelton. A number of islanders were on board, including four women and two children. Several hours out the ship was captured by the German raider *Komet*. The crew and passengers were taken aboard the raider before the *Holmwood* was sunk. The *Komet* went on to intercept and destroy several other vessels, including the New Zealand Shipping Company’s motor-liner *Rangitane*. Sixteen people lost their lives in that incident. A month later, the captives were left on Emirau Island in the Bismarck Archipelago (now part of the New Ireland Province of Papua New Guinea). The Chatham Island passengers finally reached New Zealand, via Australia, in mid-January 1941. From Sydney D. Waters, *German Raiders in the Pacific* (Wellington: War History Branch, Dept. of Internal Affairs, 1949), page 21.

¹⁵⁵ David Holmes, *ibid.*, 104-05. The base provided emergency refuelling facilities for civilian and maritime aircraft co-opted into wartime service.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 105. The bridge’s opening was a gala event, with many islanders attending.

¹⁵⁷ Arbuckle, 34.

¹⁵⁸ David Holmes, *ibid.*, 24.

¹⁵⁹ “Life Down at the Chathams is Easy - but Comfortless,” *New Zealand Freelance*, 29 June 1949; “Vehicles Using Roads Formed in Chathams,” *Sun*, 25 February 1949.

¹⁶⁰ “Vehicles Using Roads Formed in Chathams”.

¹⁶¹ “Chatham Islands: Freights Increase the Cost of Living,” *PR*, 11 January 1951.

travel in lorries, jeeps, motorcycles, and cars, but not everyone shared the benefits of new roads. Some from the north and northwest had risen at 3 a.m. to prepare for a horseback journey.¹⁶² Islanders marvelled at the prospect of a monthly service by air. According to Fr. Gerald Arbuckle, who studied the island community in the early 1980s, this further reduced their sense of isolation, and had “a vital psychological effect”.¹⁶³ It was reassuring to know the service was available in cases of serious illness or injury.¹⁶⁴ Still, an air of uncertainty remained. Changeable wind conditions often made the lagoon too rough for landing, and even after touching down, there were times when choppy conditions prevented a boat from coming safely alongside, due to the risk of damaging the plane. The flying boat would be forced to return to the mainland, and one islander recalled making five trips across the water before finally making land.¹⁶⁵

Conclusion

Life experiences within a given environment shape our cultures and help define a groups’ reality. Climate and weather also strongly influence the functions and flows of daily life. It might also be said that reality defines life experiences. In terms of mobility, the boggy environment dictated a much slower pace of life for Chatham Islanders, for the movement of people, animals, and goods, and in maintaining social connections. Without infrastructure theirs was a very different reality to most New Zealanders. Outsiders often failed to understand or appreciate how the island environment influenced and shaped the perceptions and judgements of the people. It was much easier to simply criticise “arrested development”, or to ignore its root causes. For instance, in 1990, Michael King wrote of a distinctive culture, one that arose in response to feelings of detachment from mainland New Zealand, and neglect by government. This formed the basis of his argument that the Chathams were “a land apart”.¹⁶⁶ This showed in non-conformity; a casualness about dress and appearance, obstinacy in the face of advice or criticism, attributes which firmly set the Chatham Islanders apart from mainlanders.¹⁶⁷ However, as this chapter has shown, these characteristics were as likely the result of a specific set of weather, climate, and environmental conditions, and

¹⁶² “Chathams Less Isolated,” *EP*, 6 December 1950.

¹⁶³ Arbuckle, 13.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. “Chathams Less Isolated,” *EP*, 6 December 1950.

¹⁶⁵ This is based on personal and family experience of the Sunderland Flying Boats, and conversations with islanders.

¹⁶⁶ Michael King, *A Land Apart: The Chatham Islands of New Zealand* (Auckland: Random Century, 1990), 7.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

negative impacts on mobility. Such conditions helped shape a distinctive culture, apart from New Zealand.

Chapter 3: Place, Space, and Time

Life on Chatham Island was characterised by limited mobility and a slow pace of life. This informed the sensory experience of day-to-day life, and the residents' pedestrian pace ensured faculties of hearing, sight, smell, touch, and taste were very much in tune with the natural world. Focusing on the impact of movement on the psyche, this chapter explains the converse effects of increased speed and greater mobility for the worldly traveller. Contained within new modes of transport, and distanced from the nature, this created new and different sensory stimuli. In the Chatham Island context, outsiders, whose lives were driven by the tyranny of the clock, tended to view this place as other-worldly, and the lived effects of time-space compression as "arrested modernity". Some celebrated this as an Arcadian lifestyle, devoid of the negative pressures of modern daily living, and recognising more positive features, praised the island's natural beauty, colour and light. It is more difficult to gauge the value islanders placed on the aesthetic qualities of their surroundings. Nevertheless, I argue, that due to a slower pace of life, Chatham Islanders developed and retained a close bond with their environment.

Geographers use the concept of "time-space compression" to explain why communities developed at different rates.¹ This derives from the term 'the annihilation of space by time', which originates in the human effects of faster travel.² With the advent of the railroad, spatial distances were covered in a fraction of the original time, and speed affectively brought places closer together.³ Conversely, smaller centres began to "diverge from the larger".⁴ Remoter places were less affected by change, and therefore better suited to preserving the past.⁵ According to Gillis, islands served this purpose well. From the eighteenth century, these were often "seen as backwaters", and typically characterised as traditional and pre-industrial.⁶

In Victorian thinking, mobility and modernity went hand in hand. Faster modes of travel were a distinct material advantage, but some claimed moral and intellectual

¹ Also known as "time-space convergence".

² Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1986), 33.

³ Eric Pawson, "Time-Space Convergence in New Zealand: 1850s to 1890s," *New Zealand Journal of Geography* 94, no. 1 (1992): 14.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵ John R. Gillis, *Islands of the Mind: How the Human Imagination Created the Atlantic World*, 1 ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 123.

⁶ *Ibid.*

benefits.⁷ As Tim Cresswell explains, and the previous chapter shows, “mobility bears a number of meanings that circulate widely in the modern western world”; it signifies progress, freedom, and opportunity. More than anything else, the modern individual is a “mobile human being”, and, this represents modernity itself. However, some noted a commensurate loss of engagement with nature, the dulling of the senses; John Ruskin, for instance, described a rail journey as being sent like a parcel.⁸ Wolfgang Schivelbusch claims the industrial revolution terminated any “intensive experience of the sensuous world”.⁹ As speed blurred the foreground, depth perception was lost, and the traveler no longer felt enjoined with the landscape. Sensory changes went beyond the visual, as the traveller was effectively removed from familiar smells and sounds. Processing new stimuli caused new forms of fatigue.¹⁰

Mobility and modernity brought more people together in a physical sense, but psychologically, “progress” had the opposite effect. Rather, as larger numbers travelled and living at close confines, society became complicated and fragmented.¹¹ James Vernon contends that mobility over ever-greater distances “created a new and distinctly modern society of strangers”.¹² As industrial capitalism concentrated populations in new urban centres, migration effectively eroded traditional ties with community. Urban life was increasingly “characterized by anonymity and anomie” and change altered minds and personalities.¹³ People felt assaulted by unfamiliar sensory stimuli, and by the unpleasantness of living and working within a dense population. Relationships became more aloof, brusque, and impersonal, to stave off the irritations, anxieties, and “nervous strain” caused by urban living.¹⁴

Some would argue that technology promised a “better” life, while others recognised what had been lost; a less oppressive and complicated lifestyle, the social togetherness of a smaller community, and a closer relationship with the environment.¹⁵

⁷ T. B. Macaulay and H. M. M. Trevelyan, *The History of England from the Accession of James II* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 372.

⁸ J. Ruskin, *Modern Painters* (Smith, Elder & Co., 1872), 300.

⁹ Schivelbusch, 63.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 55-56.

¹¹ James Vernon, *Distant Strangers: How Britain Became Modern*, (University of California Press, 2014), 18. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.otago.ac.nz/stable/10.1525/j.ctt6wqbs4>.

¹² *Ibid.*, 128.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 19. Claude S Fischer, “Theories of Urbanism,” in *The Urban Sociology Reader*, ed. J. Lin and C. Mele (Routledge, 2005), 54.

¹⁴ Fischer, 54, 55.

¹⁵ Bruce Duder, *The Bush Backblocks Legacy: Family and Community Life in Northern New Zealand 1850-1950* (Self-published, 2015), 242.

In advanced societies physical contact with nature becomes increasingly indirect.¹⁶ According to Tuan, people lose that “gentle, unselfconscious involvement with the physical world that prevailed in the past, when the tempo of life was slower”.¹⁷ The antithesis of the decadent city, “innocent nature”, has the power to heal the adverse effects of sensory overload, in a more kindly and effective way than other physical or psychological techniques.¹⁸

When nineteenth century Britons arrived in New Zealand, “modern” values were firmly embedded in expectations. Efficient transport systems were a hallmark of progressive society, and roads were expected to materialise; the economic, social and political future of the colony depended on mobility, but terrain and geography posed many challenges.¹⁹ Māori walked and canoed great distances, and missionaries, explorers and gold miners also ventured inland, but in the early years of Pākehā settlement, most were confined to coastal or river settlements with water access.²⁰ Basic carts and drays served locally, but few people moved beyond their own small settlement.²¹ From the mid-nineteenth century, steam-powered vessels alleviated some uncertainties around sea travel, but New Zealand continued “in the age of sail, foot and horse traffic”, and significant aspects of the industrial revolution had little effect on society.²² From the 1870s, as rail links joined isolated regions, travellers enjoyed greater speed and comfort.²³ Benefits were uneven, however, and in remoter areas, some forms of transport used before 1850 were still being relied on at the end of the century.²⁴

Roads were not privileged in the same way as rail and shipping, but settlers in small and isolated communities worked hard to form connections.²⁵ Government placed the administration of distant projects in the hands of elected roads boards, and these

¹⁶ Yi-fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 95.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁸ Yi-fu Tuan, *Man and Nature* (Washington: Association of American Geographers, Commission on College Geography, 1971), 34; Margareta Håkanson, “Effects from Horseback Riding – Some Relevant Research Findings” in *5th Nordic Seating Symposium* (Stockholm 2012), 1.

¹⁹ James Watson, *Links: A History of Transport and New Zealand Society*, ed. New Zealand Ministry of Transport and New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs, Historical Branch (Wellington, N.Z.: Ministry of Transport, 1996), 69, 74; Graham Langton, *Networks in a New Land: Transport and Communications in Nineteenth Century New Zealand* (Auckland: Elizabethan Promotions, 2000), 2.

²⁰ Langton, 4.

²¹ Jenny Haworth, *Road's the Mode: The Story of New Zealand's Road Transport Industry*, ed. E. J. Brennan Memorial Trust and Ltd Allied Publications (Wily Publications Ltd, 2013), 10.

²² Langton, 3.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Pawson, 15; Langton, 3.

²⁵ Haworth, 12; Langton, 2.

became the “first and most basic unit of local government”.²⁶ Roads Boards raised revenue through land rates and user levies, but still relied heavily on government subsidies.²⁷ Progress was more evident from the 1920s, as motor vehicles rapidly replaced horses. Roads were upgraded, and transport networks extended.²⁸ Again, some communities remained part of a pioneer fringe, struggling on with poor roads, and in extreme cases, relying on the horse for some forms of transport and haulage until the 1940s.²⁹

While there were other factors, successful development of an area was often determined by relative accessibility. In 1956, geographer Eileen Elliott noted isolated settlements with characteristics reminiscent of an earlier era, “districts of suspended animation and intimate idiosyncrasies”, where time had little meaning.³⁰ Some impoverished communities battled on to fashion a cultural landscape, but with few natural endowments, others were deemed unworthy of the expense and effort to break those “bonds of isolation”.³¹ These factors, along with the demise of coastal shipping, led to decline and stagnation.³² Elliott regarded the Chatham Islands, one of the oldest settled communities in New Zealand, as “surely one of the most backward”. Exhibiting “the most extreme effects of isolation”, it presented a “self-contained example of a pioneer community in a typical stage of arrested development”.³³ Since 1989, the concept of time-space compression has been used to measure varied impacts on time and space.

“Chatham Island’s time”

Visitors to the Chathams often likened it to stepping back in time. In 1901, Wellington businessman James Grove found the community reminiscent of those in New Zealand 40 years earlier, when a healthy outdoor lifestyle still prevailed. To him, this was a pleasing example of “innocent nature”. The colony was ever eager to establish industries, and city streets were now filled “with men and women and boys and girls with grimy skins

²⁶ Watson, 55. Provincial Governments were responsible for roads from 1854 until 1876.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Tom Brooking, *The History of New Zealand* (Westport, Conn., Greenwood Press, 2004), 109.

²⁹ Duder, 183.

³⁰ Eileen L. Elliott, “Chatham Island: A Study in Arrested Development,” *New Zealand Geographer* 12, no. 2 (1956): 155. Elliott cites the Chaslands area of South Otago, the Okuru coastal strip from Haast to Jacksons Bay, and the Coromandel area.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid. For example, upland Taranaki and Hawkes Bay.

³³ Ibid.

and smoky complexions in place of the rosy cheeks they ought to have".³⁴ There were none with this wretched appearance in the Chathams.³⁵ However, not everyone believed this idealistic perception of island life, or celebrated its rural simplicity, and even Grove admitted there were disadvantages to this slower pace of life.³⁶ "Those who look for their morning and evening paper", he said, "and who patronise the tram-cars constantly, and the telephones, and who revel in all the other allurements of town life" would "soon die of ennui" there. Most people were too far removed from the simple life to be content for long in a place like the Chathams.³⁷

However, some who stayed awhile seemed happy to escape the tyranny of the clock.³⁸ From the 1880s, differences between the island and mainland lifestyle became more pronounced, especially in relation to time keeping. Far-removed from "the hurly-burly of the cities and the sound of the buzzer or the jangling bells on clock towers", some relished the fact there was simply no need to hurry.³⁹ Keeping the correct time of day was of little interest or importance, and in each locality, residents set the time to suit their purposes.⁴⁰ In November 1887, Sophie Moore of Moreroa Station mentions clocks being put forward so as to get up earlier. "It seems ridiculous", she told her mother, "but it is quite easy to have breakfast at half past six if we pretend it's half past seven. It's a thing you can't do in New Zealand with railways and things about, you see!!!".⁴¹ This was exasperating for visitors like Thompson, who in 1890 "lost" an hour while travelling 14 miles between Maunganui to Wharekauri. He found it difficult to "get" the correct time on the island, and it reminded him "somewhat of Mark Twain's watch".⁴²

Time had little relevance to the islanders, and sunrise and sunset determined the day. Clocks around the islands sometimes varied by up to two hours.⁴³ Daylight saving was practised unofficially, and in 1912, one scornful journalist admitted, that in this one respect, the Chatham Islanders were more advanced than New Zealand. Sensibly, work hours on sheep stations were regulated "according to natural and rational" divisions of time, rather than by the "artificial and arbitrary".⁴⁴ Some time prior to 1945, the

³⁴ "Down at the Chathams", *ST*, 25 July 1901.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ "Sayings of the Scribes," *Northern Advocate*, 10 August 1901; "Chatham Island," *EP*, 20 July 1901.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ "Description of the Chatham Islands," *NZG*, 10 February 1894.

³⁹ Joseph Robert Sigley, c. 1904, "Some Impressions of Chatham Island", Z.Ms SIG, CCLA.

⁴⁰ "The Chatham Islands," *NZH*, 23 March 1912.

⁴¹ Sophia Moore to Fanny, 10 Nov 1887, MS-Papers-10850, Moore Letters, ATL.

⁴² "Six Weeks at the Chathams", *PR*, 31 March 1890.

⁴³ "The Chatham Islands," *NZH*, 23 March 1912.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Chatham Islanders collectively agreed to set all clocks 45 minutes ahead of New Zealand time.⁴⁵ Even internal standardisation failed to fully appease marine authorities, and some legal uniformity was sought. In 1956, islanders voted to retain their independent time, and this was formalised the following year by an amendment to the Standard Time Act 1945.⁴⁶

Carried along by the natural rhythms of everyday life, even the days of the week seemed unimportant. As Sigley noted in the early 1900s, “everyone seems happy and able to enjoy the quiet restful life ... one can easily forget the day of the week, even Christmas Day at times has been forgotten”.⁴⁷ On Pitt Island it was even easier to forget what day it was. Ernest Langdale-Hunt, who was raised in New Zealand, noted this habit with some amusement. It was not unusual, when in the middle of a job, to encounter a neighbour wearing tidier clothes than usual. Greeted with, “Hello, have you retired or just given up work?”, the reply usually went, “No. Don't you know it is Sunday?” Argument almost always failed to settle the issue, and when the steamer next called, the matter would finally be resolved. Everyone then resumed life on the correct day and month of the year.⁴⁸

This timeless fluidity was in marked contrast to the mainland, where the British concept of time and timeliness prevailed. This was reflected in the colonist's approach to mobility.⁴⁹ Early travel was slow and dangerous, yet there was always a strong commercial and social impetus to arrive in a timely manner.⁵⁰ There were frequent accidents and drownings, the latter becoming known as “the New Zealand Death”, and James Watson believes time pressures were a major factor.⁵¹ Travel highlighted differences between Māori and Pākehā; Pākehā depending on Māori to reach their destination as quickly as possible were often frustrated by guides who did not share this sense of urgency.⁵² However, Māori understood the limitations and dangers of the environment, and were attuned to the seasons, rather than the clock. This was the ongoing ethos in the Chatham Islands, where the environment governed everyday lives. A sense of timelessness prevailed, one that everyone subscribed to, and this was reflected in the approach to mobility. By necessity, people accepted a slower, more

⁴⁵ It is not known exactly when this happened.

⁴⁶ “Chatham Islands Time,” *The Chatham Islander*, February 2014, 11.

⁴⁷ Sigley.

⁴⁸ Langdale-Hunt

⁴⁹ Watson, 69.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 69-70; Langton, 3.

⁵¹ Watson, 70; Langton, *ibid.*

⁵² Watson, *ibid.*

cautious pace, one that allowed for the vagaries of climate and terrain; perhaps this explains why treacherous bogs claimed no human lives.

Some outsiders relished the slower pace of life, the sense of returning to a bygone era, and slipping into a state of timelessness. Sigley found his sojourn in the Chathams just the tonic. There were few of those annoying distractions of the modern world, “no franchises, no newspapers, no mendicant friars or corner street beggars, no Salvation Army bands.” Those leaving “the helter-skelter of more populous centres” might “get the cobwebs out of the brain”, and find their stress diluted. The “down and out” and disillusioned would quickly “perk up again” in such a place.⁵³ One journalist in 1912 was harshly critical of what he considered a lackadaisical lifestyle, but was forced to concede the islanders had few worries. “There one works and eats and sleeps”, he wrote, “and certainly the open-air life that practically everybody leads helps much”.⁵⁴ Those surrounded by “the bustle and clamour and dirt of the city” would “find a complete contrast in the quiet, restful isolation of the Chathams.”⁵⁵

The bustle, noise, and pollution of urban life in New Zealand increased markedly with the use of the combustion engine. In 1910, teacher Harold Silcock was grateful there were no formed roads on the island, as “no motor cars hoot over the land and defile the evening air”. He found island life eminently peaceful, “far from the rush and roar of modern methods” (figure 9).⁵⁶ Little had changed by 1933, when one visitor noted:

There are so many things off your mind. No frantic rushes across the street to save your life, for there is no motor traffic to menace you, indeed it would be difficult to find a street to rush across. No trains or cars or buses to rush for, no need to bolt to the daily job with half a breakfast. The sheep or the fish can always wait.⁵⁷

⁵³ Sigley.

⁵⁴ “The Chatham Islands,” *NZH*, 23 March 1912.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ “The Chatham Islands,” *AG*, 13 July 1910.

⁵⁷ “Chatham Islands,” *AS*, 25 March 1933. This is a simplistic view of conditions in the Chathams during the economic depression of the 1930s. The hardships of island life during this period are covered in a following chapter.

One Scottish traveller likened the group to the Shetland Islands, which, in relation to Scotland, was “a land of semi-primitive conditions in many respects.”⁵⁸ Many would find such places a “trifle monotonous”, but there were distinct advantages.⁵⁹



Figure 9: No rush. Harry Silcock lived beside this stretch of thoroughfare at Te One, one of the best on the island. It is seen here dry and passable c. 1936. William B. Burt, private collection of Bryce Shirtcliffe.

Most Chatham Islanders visited New Zealand at some time, but it seems many eschewed the artificial pleasures of “advanced” society on the mainland, and were glad to leave.⁶⁰ In 1907, a number visited the New Zealand International Exhibition in Christchurch, and an island newspaper correspondent was surprised at their response.⁶¹ “I hear on all sides expressions of disappointment”, he wrote, and “find it strange that those who see very little of town life expect so much more than those who do”. While islanders “read a

⁵⁸ “Chatham Islands,” *AS*, 25 March 1933.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ “Down at the Chathams,” *ST*, 25 July 1901.

⁶¹ Held in 1906-07, the exhibition was described as illustrating ‘the progress, position and potentialities of New Zealand in industries, manufactures, science and art’, and it was specifically addressed to settlers, manufacturers, tourists, and foreign merchants.

lot about civilization, and its attendant luxuries”, he could only suppose they must be “looking for more than they find”.⁶² However, evidence suggests the opposite; that islander’s expectations were over met. The sudden immersion in a variety of new stimuli, the “bright lights” of the city, induced a sensory overload difficult to deal with for any length of time. One Māori resident succinctly described the problem. Leaving the island for the first time as an adult, he found one week in Christchurch quite enough. “Too many people, too much noise,” he explained.⁶³

Charles Wishart expressed similar sentiments. A long-term resident and farmer, Wishart took a holiday in New Zealand in 1907, the first time he had left the island in 17 years. Many new experiences awaited him, such as electric lighting and electric trams. A few weeks was quite enough, he claimed, and he looked forward to returning “to the peaceful uneventfulness of his island home”.⁶⁴ Wishart spoke favourably of his “happy land far, far away”, and described a haven of “perpetual youth and civic irresponsibility”.⁶⁵ “Ours is a little country”, he explained, “free from rates and taxes”. There was no poverty, “how could there be when nature supplies food so abundantly!”. “Yes, it is a simple life”, he concluded, but one that “agrees with us immensely ... it grows upon one, until one finds it almost impossible to entertain the idea of settling down in a more closely populated country ... New Zealand is all very well for a holiday, but —”.⁶⁶

Wishart clearly values the physical qualities of island life, and has a strong emotional bond with this place. Nevertheless, he is reserved in his expressions, and seems unconcerned with aesthetics. Tuan believes the person on the land does possess an aesthetic appreciation for their surroundings, but seldom articulates these sentiments. The farmer has a physical intimacy with nature, but sensory responses are tempered by physical dependence; this “complex attitude” derives from their total immersion in their environment.⁶⁷ This highlights important differences “between the lived experience and the written record”.⁶⁸

⁶² “Chatham Islands”, *WA*, 3 May 1907. If the correspondent was a newcomer to the island, he may have struggled to understand this phenomenon.

⁶³ “Chatham Island,” *WA*, 22 June 1909.

⁶⁴ “The Simple Life Materialised,” *PR*, 9 July 1907.

⁶⁵ “The Simple Life Materialised”; “The Chathams,” *Manawatu Times*, 13 July 1907.

⁶⁶ “The Simple Life Materialised”.

⁶⁷ Tuan, *Topophilia*, 63, 97.

⁶⁸ E. Foyster and C. Whatley, “Introduction,” in *A History of Everyday Life in Scotland, 1600 to 1800*, ed. E. Foyster and C. Whatley (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 3.

Engaging the senses

With few of those accepted canons of beauty, even to island visitors, there seemed little to evoke an immediate awe-struck response in the Chathams. Still, it fell to “outsiders” to note the aesthetic and sensory characteristics that local people took for granted, and seldom bothered to record.⁶⁹ Tuan suggests visitors are more likely to consciously use the eye, to compose pictures, form a viewpoint, and share this with others.⁷⁰ Lacking those “agreeable features”, Chatham Island often disappointed the new arrival, and accounts often hint at “deficiency”. Many, like the Reverend Fraer, found the hills too few and small, and the land too “low and undulating”, especially when compared to the “bold, rugged features of New Zealand coastal and landscape scenery”.⁷¹ Travellers from the South Island missed the spectacular backdrop of snow-capped mountains.⁷² The Reverend Laurie Canter described “a long straggling rock bound coast and low hills”.⁷³ From the steamer, Sigley found the outlook “somewhat discouraging, the land having an appearance similar to a huge, badly cooked damper flopped into the sea”.⁷⁴ Others thought the “stunted” vegetation was unattractive, and regretted the scarcity of exotic trees.⁷⁵ Some semi-wooded areas of native vegetation did reward the aesthetic gaze; often described as “park-like”, these happily conformed to expectations.⁷⁶ But with large areas covered in “a hard, unlovely species of fern”, the island generally presented a “drab appearance”.⁷⁷ These responses reveal the often-irrational expectations of Pākehā travellers, and reflect a poor understanding of the environment and oceanic climate.

In fact, the average New Zealander knew very little about the Chatham Islands. Most understood these were under New Zealand authority, and lay somewhere adjacent, “perhaps in the Antarctic, perhaps up where the bananas grow”.⁷⁸ There was little information available, and many visitors felt compelled to remedy this deficit. The forthright Canter was quick to scotch any fanciful notions, telling newspaper readers

⁶⁹ Ibid., 217.

⁷⁰ Tuan, *Topophilia*, 63.

⁷¹ “Life in the Chathams,” *PR*, 25 March 1913

⁷² “The Chatham Islands,” *WA*, 26 June 1906.

⁷³ “Life on the Chatham Islands,” *Lake County Press* (hereafter LCP), 17 September 1925.

⁷⁴ Sigley.

⁷⁵ “The Chatham Islands,” *WA*, 26 June 1906; “The Chatham Islands,” *AG*, 13 July 1910; “The Chatham Islands,” *SR*, 24 January 1902.

⁷⁶ “The Chatham Islands,” *AG*, 13 July 1910; “The Chatham Islands,” *WA*, *ibid.* Many described the trees as stunted. “Aesthetic” derives from the Greek *aesthesis*, meaning sense perception.

⁷⁷ “Life on the Chatham Islands”; “Chatham Islands,” *Bruce Herald*, 25 March 1918.

⁷⁸ “Chatham Islands,” *EP*, 7 February 1924.

that: “One must put aside all preconceived ideas of the South Sea Islands of fiction with their tropical climate and banana groves, their sunshine and laughter, their music and romance”.⁷⁹ The Chathams did “not in the least answer to this description”, in fact, there was “no natural beauty to be seen”.⁸⁰



Figure 10: Te One c. 1900. St Augustine’s Church at centre, the school is the two-storied building across the road, and the Institute Hall is obscured by trees to the right. Postcard, Chatham Islands Series 3, printed by Lilywhite. Hocken Collections, Dunedin, 0315_01_001A.

The reports of others unashamedly reflect colonial ambition. Politician William Steward imagined the Chathams would become another little piece of Britain, and his principal reason for visiting was to promote productivity and closer settlement. He expediently highlighted aspects that would appeal to the would-be settler and embellished its untapped potential.⁸¹ He ignored the natural features, and focused on the exotic; thriving imported grasses, and the occasional English or Californian tree. He spoke of English garden plants flourishing around substantial homesteads, and described the “pretty little village” of Te One as the epitome of civilisation and refinement (figure 10).

⁷⁹ “Life on the Chatham Islands”.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ “Trip to the Chatham Islands”, *Bush Advocate*, 22 January 1889.

Quality pasture lands nearby were evidence of the island's fertility.⁸² Steward did comment more widely, but his primary purpose overrode any tendency to indulge in the aesthetic. In doing so, he supports Tuan's theory of place perception, where a pragmatic approach such as this always falls short of the "authentic". Passing through does not "enjoin man and nature".⁸³

It was those who spent time on the island and who travelled extensively who were more likely to appreciate its unique environment. Good weather certainly helped. In the absence of conventional "agreeable features", visitors looked to other, less obvious island characteristics to ascribe meaning to this "unusual" place. They did this by engaging the senses. Henry Forbes of Canterbury Museum was pleasantly surprised. From what he had heard, he expected "a wild, bleak and generally uninviting speck of land". Instead, when he first saw the island, the whole landscape was bathed in morning sunshine, and on "one of the most perfect of days ... it seemed that to be exiled here out of the care and confusion of the world could not be altogether an unsupportable endurance".⁸⁴ The Reverend Edgar claimed he could happily forego "the bold, rocky, precipitous coast line" of New Zealand for the Chathams "delightful succession of beautiful beaches with regular outline".⁸⁵

The Chatham Island experience was clearly more enjoyable to those able to see past poor weather, isolation, and challenging travel. One visitor in 1894 wrote,

I have been here three months now, and am charmed with it. I do not think I have seen any place I like so much. Of course, I have seen grander scenery. This is pretty. It is all so beautifully green; not any tussock to be seen; and it reminds me a little of the Isle of Wight ... as you stand on the steamer you might imagine you are on a large lake, as—to the eye—the land seems all round you. In front of you are pretty red clay cliffs. There is plenty of bush, and some of the island trees are very pretty. We have had a good deal of rain since I came; but we are forgetting all about it now the summer has come, and we have had a spell of beautiful weather. This month I am going to different parts of the island to pay some visits. We, of course, ride everywhere. There are no roads here, and to get to one station I will have to ride six miles through Lake Whanga! I would recommend anyone to come to the Chathams for a change during the short trips.⁸⁶ I am sure they would enjoy it. Of course, it is quiet; but there is plenty of fishing, shooting, riding, and also a little boating. I missed

⁸² "The Chatham Islands", *SR*, 24 January 1902.

⁸³ Tuan, *Topophilia*, 95.

⁸⁴ Henry O. Forbes, "The Chatham Islands and Their Story," in *The Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 59 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1893), 670. <https://books.google.co.nz/>.

⁸⁵ "Chatham Islands," *Bruce Herald*, 25 March 1918.

⁸⁶ The writer is referring to the "wool season", when shipping was much more frequent.

having no letters and papers at first, but soon got used to it. It does not seem three months.⁸⁷

The Reverend Bowen experienced atrocious weather during his stay, but this did not detract from his appreciation of the island's natural beauty. He believed colour, rather than form, constituted "the charm of the Chatham Island landscape":

the green slopes, — the varied tints of the woods, the red cliffs, the white beaches sparkling in the sunlight, the still whiter line of the surf breaking in graceful curve along the shores: above all, the brilliant blue of the ocean relieved by the deep shadows cast by the frequent clouds above - all go to make up a picture of which no mere photograph could give any real conception.⁸⁸

Even more pragmatic individuals like the Reverend Laurie Canter admitted that "one's first impression grows stronger on better acquaintance".⁸⁹ Canter and his family spent two-years there in the early 1920s. Twenty years later, Ruth Canter recalled the climate, with few days of cloudless blue sky, "it rained and it cleared with such frequency that one took no notice". But it was the rainbows she remembered, "double rainbows, perfect arcs of brightest colour were a daily scene ... I never see a rainbow without thinking of the Chathams".⁹⁰ The Canters left in 1925, and Bishop West-Watson of Christchurch was relieved when the Reverend Robert Kelham volunteered for two months' service. West-Watson was surprised at his willingness to leave a comfortable rural parish to undertake such challenging work. As it transpired, Kelham had once engaged in mission work in the Chathams, and West-Watson believed he had "left part of his heart" there.⁹¹ The Bishop himself visited "the lonely" island several times, and found it "very beautiful in parts".⁹² It reminded him, "oddly enough, of the Old Country, with their patches of Scottish moors, English park lands, sandy white beaches, tall lime-cliffs, and colourful seas".⁹³ Travelling on foot or horseback was "rough going" at times, but "everyone was most cheery". The people seemed to live "in a world of their own,

⁸⁷ "Description of the Chatham Islands," *NZH*, 10 February 1894.

⁸⁸ Reverend Croasdaile Bowen, *Account of a visit to the Chatham Islands, 1874*, Pattison, Hoel Thornthwaite, Papers, MS-Papers-9665-2, ATL.

⁸⁹ "Life on the Chatham Islands".

⁹⁰ Ruth Canter, "A Brake on Development in Chatham Islands", *Auckland Weekly News*, 12 June 1946.

⁹¹ "The Lonely Chathams", *PR* 7 June 1926; "Obituary," *PR*, 15 October 1927.

⁹² "Lonely Chathams", *PR*, 7 March 1927.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

with their own traditions”, and life was “similar to that in New Zealand seventy-five years ago” (figure 11).⁹⁴



Figure 11: Farmer Harry Blyth packing stores to Tuku c. 1938.
William B. Burt, private collection of Bryce Shirtcliffe.

Some visitors were surprised the Chathams were not promoted as a tourist destination, while others recognised the limitations.⁹⁵ With “nothing of sensational character”, Forbes feared “the ordinary tourist” would not be attracted there.⁹⁶ A long spell of quietude, “so much quieter than the average New Zealander is used to”, would not suit everyone.⁹⁷ The islands were unlikely to become a popular tourist destination in the conventional sense, but were perhaps better suited to those wanting “to leave the beaten track of their fellows”. Those with an interest in the natural world found the islands met, and even exceeded, expectations. Walter Wallace’s holiday in 1905 is a case in point. The young chemist from Timaru went armed with a camera and a passion for natural history. He was grateful to good-humoured islanders, who supported his interests and accompanied him about the island. He enjoyed “splendid” views of

⁹⁴ “Chatham Islands,” *PR*, 28 March 1929.

⁹⁵ “Tourist Service,” *NZH*, 15 May 1936; “A Holiday at the Chathams,” *TIM*, 6 May 1905.

⁹⁶ Forbes, 669.

⁹⁷ “A Holiday at the Chathams,” *TIM*, 6 May 1905.

unfamiliar coastlines, and “cliffs of bright red sandy clay, topped ... with trees and scrubs of emerald green, forming a brilliant contrast”.⁹⁸

As a journalist friend later noted, people like Wallace went to a place like the Chathams to use their eyes, and were therefore amply rewarded. Intent on making the most of the opportunity, Wallace observed and imbibed as much as possible of this place. Nothing appears to bother him during his month-long stay. “To wander on foot or on horseback”, he wrote, “is to see much that is beautiful and meet with novel adventures ... tracks that lead in most unexpected directions, tumbles into swamp holes and soft sandy creek bottoms” were mere incidents. As there was some distance from “anywhere to anywhere else, an investigator can fill in quite an interesting day”. Wallace left with pleasant memories, “such as few holidays of as limited extent could afford”.⁹⁹

Grand scenery was abundantly displayed in New Zealand, and in comparison, it is clear the Chatham Islands were perceived as something of a poor relation. However, it was this assumed deficiency, this difference, that did evoke awe-struck responses in some island travellers. Those with a scientific or scholarly involvement, those who went to exercise their eyes, perceived much more than the drab monotony of the clears, or the inconvenience of bogs and mud. The journals of explorers are rich in sudden revelations of distinctive natural beauty, and the intensity of these moments is often met with a hint of surprise.¹⁰⁰ In 1924, Henry Skinner of the Otago Museum joined a scientific expedition to the Chathams.

Sometimes we rode in clear sunshine over peaty uplands thick with flowering asters; sometimes, standing on the windy cliff edge, we looked east and west along the surf-beaten wall, or south across the straits to Pitt Island with its fringing islets and pinnacles. Often, coming from the dense shade of the bush, we saw the blue Pacific through the trees with white surf breaking on the white beach, and imagined we were in tropical Polynesia.¹⁰¹

Noting the island’s contrasting colours, Elliott’s eyes were drawn to volcanic peaks which formed “oases in the monotony of the peat”.¹⁰² Green pastures on limestone under Maunganui were “spectacular in their vividness”. Yet, Elliott believed the real beauty of the landscape owed less to form and colour than, “the play of constantly

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Tuan, 94.

¹⁰¹ H. D. Skinner, *The Morioris*, ed. William Baucke (Honolulu, Hawaii: The Museum, 1928), 3.

¹⁰² Elliott, 160.

changing light on the mingling of glossy green bush and dark lagoons, brown ‘clears’ and red and gold sphagnum bogs, blue sea and silver sand”.¹⁰³

Forbes highlights the impact of colour and light in an otherwise dull environment. Travelling on horseback into the uninhabited southern tablelands, he discovered peat beds displaying their own distinctive beauty.¹⁰⁴ Some larger, water-logged depressions “were covered with a brilliant coloured carpet of luxuriant mosses, emitting an aromatic fragrance, spread out in artless undesigned parterres, rich with commingled green, yellow, and purple”.¹⁰⁵ The varied shades of these “floating gardens” warned the experienced traveller of dangerous bogs beneath, while at the same time brightening miles of treeless landscape which would otherwise seem “uninviting and uninteresting”.¹⁰⁶ On higher slopes, stunted scrub-like vegetation was interspersed with attractive, flowering native plants, the most spectacular being the Chatham Island Christmas tree, with “golden domes – gorgeous even beneath a gloomy sky”.¹⁰⁷

Forbes was less cheerful when he and his guide reaching their shelter, a lonely shepherd’s hut on the Awatapu cliffs, where,

a mizzling mist came down with its chilling dampness, and what with the sombre green of the dripping lichen and moss-hung trees standing ghostly around, the solitude and silence of the region, broken now and then only by the harsh screech of a mutton bird, and the deepening dusk, the landscape, which all the way had worn a cold and uninviting countenance, now grew as dismal and repellent as can be conceived.¹⁰⁸

The men soon collapsed, exhausted, but Forbes was about to learn how scene and mood can change with astonishing rapidity in this island environment. He wrote,

When we awoke in the morning we unbarred the door to a fresh-born scene—the Awatapu of yesterday had undergone transfiguration. The dull leaden sky had vanished, the last scrolls of mist were dissolving into space, the grey-beard lichens were dotted with glistening beads, the *ake-ake* trees, whose foliage yesterday stood reversed to the north-west wind in a cold and shivering attitude, were this morning fluttering their silver

¹⁰³ Ibid., 165.

¹⁰⁴ “The Bogs of the Chathams,” *TIM*, 17 June 1893.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.; Forbes, 683.

¹⁰⁷ Forbes, *ibid.*, 684. The Chatham Island Christmas tree is the common name for *rautini* or *brachyglottis huntii*. Other notable species he mentioned were an aster (*Olearia semidentata*), grass tree (tarahinau or *dracophyllum arboretum*), and brightly berried leucopogons (*Leucopogon parviflorus* or Chatham Island Mingimingi, all endemic to the island).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

under-sided leaves to the sou'wester beneath a bright sun and a blue sky, so that the woods where they were abundant looked starred with flowers. Instead of silence ... sparrows ... were lustily chirruping; the adjacent shrubberies were full of the exquisite notes of the bell-bird ... the booming of pigeons and the warble of the white-cravated tui. As for solitude the fantails ... came fearlessly circling round our heads, and followed us along the forest paths, flitting by our side from tree to tree, as if offering their own bright companionship and happy in ours.¹⁰⁹

Forbes warily descended a precipitous slope to reach Moriori kitchen-middens on the shore beneath the cliffs, the object of their journey. Free from grazing animals, rich vegetation presented “an unbroken sheet of verdure from their summits down to the verge of the water”.¹¹⁰ Forbes could not resist scrambling to a suitable vantage point to fully view a scene,

from which nothing that could increase the qualification of the eye or the mind seemed absent—the chief of many pictures of un-wonted beauty which from time to time I caught in the island in hurrying from hunting-ground to hunting-ground, but which, though ever bright and vivid to myself, I can scarcely hope to describe in words which will not appear extravagant and superlative to the calm reader, even if I indicate merely its outlines: - the sun in a cloudless sky lighting up a deep sapphire sea, from which rises in massive stateliness a solid wall of foliage of the darkest green, lit here and there by a clump of the golden ragwort or a patch of purple veronica; the blue waves circling round the off-lying rocks in snowy rings and rolling on in endless tides to break in rainbow-tinted spray against the black, unverdured line of rocks that belt the shore seven hundred feet below the eye ... high overhead the magnificent native pigeon, toying with the strong up-draught of the breeze against the cliffs, wheels in the blue. These are the mere elements of the fair scene which the reader must imagine for himself.¹¹¹

Perhaps Forbes had reservations about departing from scientific reporting, and possibly alienating the reader by expressing his enthusiasm in such emotive language, but the profound impact of the sensory experience overrode any the fear of disturbing the “calm” and objective reader.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. Forbes refers to the Chatham Island ake-ake (*Olearia traversii*), and “Veronica” is Chatham Island koromiko (*Veronica chathamica*), an endemic hebe. The endemic birds mentioned are pigeon (parea (from Moriori), (*Hemiphaga chathamensis*), tūi (*Prothemadera novaeseelandiae chathamensis*), and fantail (Pīwakawaka, *Rhipidura fuliginosa ssp. penita*).

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 685.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

“Our Chatham Islands Home”

Laden with sensory perceptions, in marked contrast to the previous chapter, these visitor accounts provide a dynamic record of the Chatham environment and inherent beauties therein. Unfortunately, long-term island residents seldom recorded aesthetic responses to environment, therefore it is difficult to pinpoint aspects that triggered a positive sensory response. However, bond with place is more than implied. One powerful example is found in the correspondence of Māui Pōmare, who went on to become the first Māori doctor.¹¹² Pōmare spent most of his childhood years in the Chathams, and maintained many island friendships.¹¹³ He often returned during school holidays, and regularly corresponded with island farmer Thomas Ritchie, a good friend of his late father.¹¹⁴ In 1889, near the end of his schooldays, Pōmare told Ritchie that he felt his future belonged in the Chathams. Clearly, the simplicity of life there offered a less challenging alternative to the path his life seemed set upon.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, ten months later, Pōmare was studying medicine at Battle Creek College in Michigan.¹¹⁶ From Michigan, he wrote longingly of the beauty and peace of the Chathams.

I cannot help but seeing visions of the many happy days I spent on the Chatham Isle ... I had no care then ... oh how I long to be back on the beautiful shores of Chatham again. America may boast of the inventions, she may boast of the freedom, but oh, only give me the freedom to visit once again those beautiful white shores of my childhood land. I can tell you, distance only intensifies the love for one's own country. Oh, had I the wings of a dove then would I fly to the lonely but lovely Isle of Chatham and be at rest.¹¹⁷

It seems the Chathams were never far from his mind. Island farmer, Arthur Blakiston, remembered Pōmares' return during one long vacation.¹¹⁸ After spending several weeks

¹¹² Pōmare was to become a leading health reformer and politician. His grandfather, Wiremu Piti Pōmare (William Pitt) was among tribal leaders who commandeered *Rodney* at Port Nicholson in 1835 and brought 900 Ngati Mutunga and Ngati Tama to the islands.¹¹² Māui's father, Wiremu Naera Pōmare, was awarded a large proportion of the islands through a Native Land Court decision in 1870.

¹¹³ Graham Butterworth. 'Pomare, Maui Wiremu Piti Naera', from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 30-Oct-2011. <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/3p30/pomare-maui-wiremu-piti-naera>.

¹¹⁴ E. R. Chudleigh, *Diary of E.R. Chudleigh, 1862-1921: Chatham Islands*, ed. Eva Carlisle Richards (Christchurch: Simpson and Williams, 1950), 157; A. J. Blakiston, *My Yesteryears* (Timaru N.Z.: Timaru Herald, 1952), 39.

¹¹⁵ Pomare to Ritchie, March 24, 1893, Maui Wiremu Piti Naera Pomare, Correspondence, MS-Papers-1638, ATL.

¹¹⁶ Pomare to Ritchie, December 2, 1893, *ibid*.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*.

¹¹⁸ Blakiston, 39. According to Angela Ballara, Pōmare returned to New Zealand only once during his seven years in the US. This was in 1895.

outdoors as part of a birding party, when returning to Waitangi, he stopped to talk with Blakiston. The young man getting off the horse looked very different in appearance from the student recently arrived from America. “This is a great life”, he told Blakiston, “it appeals to me”. Blakiston sensed he wanted to remain, but encouraged him to return to his studies.¹¹⁹ Pōmare kept the Chathams close to heart, through a poem written by his friend Ritchie. Titled “Our Chatham Island Home”, Pōmare thought the words were “most beautiful”.¹²⁰ When he gave lectures in the US, he always finished by reading the poem, telling Ritchie, “I repeated it 100 times, oh no, I say, 1000 times”.¹²¹ It read:

Where the great Pacific Ocean
To Heaven uplifts its smile,
Its crystal waters laving
The white shores of Chatham Isle
There in its virgin beauty,
Like emerald set in foam,
Sleets on the ocean's bosom
Our Chatham Island Home¹²²

In his correspondence, Pōmare unashamedly expresses affection for the island. This degree of openness is exceptional, as it seems islanders seldom shared their appreciation for their home. In the early 1900s, one Pākehā family sold up and moved to New Zealand after 40 years on the island, but that did not last. They soon returned to start afresh on another farm, and appeared even happier than before.¹²³ In 1924, Maude Seymour noted the same “curious though interesting fact”, that people were often “lured back to their original home”.¹²⁴ She could not explain this attraction, but believed it was a “forceful” one.¹²⁵ Noting this phenomena in 1909, a local correspondent could only surmise the place must “grow on people” the longer they stayed there, as the majority of settlers seemed to have “unbounded confidence in the islands”.¹²⁶

This inexplicable attachment implies a strong sense of belonging. Paul Adams is convinced that close proximity to nature and contact with the earth engenders “a special

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Pomare to Ritchie, December 2, 1893, *ibid.*

¹²¹ Ibid., May 19, 1894, *ibid.*

¹²² Lyndsay Head, ““E Hoa E Riti” - Friend Ritchie,” *Archifacts* 2 (1988): 24.

¹²³ “Chatham Island,” *WA*, 22 June 1909.

¹²⁴ Maud Ella Seymour, “A History of the Chatham Islands” (MA Thesis, University of New Zealand, 1924), 78.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ “Chatham Island,” *WA*, 22 June 1909.

kind of knowledge of the world and one's place in it".¹²⁷ He explains how walking helps build this relationship, as it permits a "multisensory intake" of nature.¹²⁸ He cites the call of birds, the brush of grass against the legs, the smell of blossom, and eating berries along the way, as possible sensory interactions while walking. He also relates the importance of proprioceptive stimuli, the "least understood of the senses", and describes how signals from the muscles establish a kind of dialogue with the earth.¹²⁹ When climbing a hill, for example, the ascent is felt as resistance, whereas the descent is felt as acceleration. I argue, that in a similar way, riding a horse has the potential to intensify, rather than diminish the sensory experience, especially at the pedestrian pace dictated by much of the island terrain.¹³⁰

In close contact with a spirited animal, the rider is aware of the same proprioceptive stimuli, sensations transferred to their body by the animation and vitality of the horse. Stephen Smith describes this as "a sensory and essential attunement ... a kinaesthetic consciousness of subtle changes of posture, position, gesture, and expression."¹³¹ The rider feels the horse's jarring as it moves downhill, and also experiences this as resistance. When the horse accelerates, the rider becomes fully aware its horse's strength. Moving at speed on a strong and highly-sensory animal is guaranteed to excite the senses, as riders would attest. Galloping along a beach, for instance, is a highly sensory experience; the rush of air past the face, the pounding of hooves, the taste of salty sea spray, or the sting of sand thrown up by hooves ahead. This is very different to being encapsulated within the controlled environment of a motor vehicle and pressing the accelerator, or being carried along like a parcel in a speeding train.

The act of riding itself also enhances the sensory intake in more mundane ways. Firstly, the horse provides an elevated vantage point; it is possible to see further than on foot, and the rider can look around while moving forward without fear of tripping over obstacles.¹³² Secondly, the rider suffers less fatigue than the walker and can better enjoy the scene.¹³³ Thirdly, the rider is enjoined with another living being, and humans

¹²⁷ Paul C. Adams, "Peripatetic Imagery and Peripatetic Sense of Place," in *Textures of Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies*, ed. Paul C. Adams, Steven D. Hoelscher, and Karen E. Till (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 188.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Stephen J Smith, "Riding in the Skin of the Movement: An Agogic Practice," *Phenomenology & Practice* 9, no. 1 (2015): 49.

¹³² Watson, 35.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

process sensory information from natural entities with greater ease than artificial contraptions.¹³⁴ Moreover, many riders develop a close bond with their horse, and the journey horse of the past often became a companion, sharing “the dangers, hardships and triumphs of travel”.¹³⁵ Human and equine senses are independent, yet it is still possible for man and horse to achieve a natural synchronicity.

A horse’s senses are more nuanced and highly-developed than a human; this is the difference between life and death in the wild, and in the Chathams, an essential element in safely negotiating bogs and swamps.¹³⁶ Experienced riders will affirm the acuity of a horse’s intuition, some indefinable “sixth sense” alerting them to danger.¹³⁷ For the sympathetic and attuned rider, this sixth-sense offers a space in which horse and human might enjoy a telepathic empathy, a shared language of emotion, touch, and intuition. A sensitive and respectful rider wishes to work with the horse, rather than against it, to achieve a state of unity, a melding of wills. In return, the intuitive rider is rewarded with a sense of exhilaration and empowerment.

There was no shortage of good horses on Chatham Island (figure 12).¹³⁸ From the early 1850s, Māori paid “extraordinary sums” for breeding mares and quality stallions brought by Sydney traders”.¹³⁹ Their progeny were staunch and hardy, capable of travelling great distances in a day, with few oats or other hard feed. Clever at negotiating swamps and bogs, visitors praised their intelligent and intuitive nature.¹⁴⁰ In 1882, the Reverend Anderson found the island-bred horse eminently suited to local conditions, perhaps more so than any other breed in the world. He was advised to simply hold on tight, let the horse choose the path, and not interfere with its judgements.¹⁴¹ By trusting his mount’s uncanny ability to sense danger, Anderson was

¹³⁴ Håkanson, 1.

¹³⁵ Carolyn J. Mincham, “A Social and Cultural History of the New Zealand Horse” (PhD, Massey University, 2008), 53.

¹³⁶ H. Sharpe and T. Strong, *Embodied Relating and Transformation: Tales from Equine-Facilitated Counseling* (SensePublishers, 2015), 8; “The Chatham Islands”, *SR*, 24 January 1902; “Six Weeks at the Chathams”.

¹³⁷ Margrit Coates, *Connecting with Horses: The Life Lessons We Can Learn from Horses* (Ebury Publishing, 2012), 41, 153.

¹³⁸ In 1861, Māori owned around 500 horses, a ratio of one horse for every island inhabitant. Many were sold to other settlers when large numbers of Māori left for Taranaki in the late 1860s. The 1871 census shows 581 horses in the ownership of 133 Pākehā residents. The general availability of horses is difficult to determine, because only Pākehā-owned horses are recording in census returns. Also, herds of unknown ownership roamed in a semi-wild state, and better-quality animals were sometimes captured and broken in. As no fresh bloodlines were introduced the quality of the horse degenerated over time. By 1913, the estimated ratio was three horses to every inhabitant, and other sources confirm that horses were always plentiful on the island.

¹³⁹ Bowen.

¹⁴⁰ “Six Weeks at the Chathams”; “The Chatham Islands”, *SR*, 24 January 1902.

¹⁴¹ “Six Weeks at the Chathams.”

able to venture places “where a New Zealand horse and rider would come to unutterable grief”.¹⁴² Others acknowledged the same sterling qualities, claiming the island-bred horse “would always pull you through the most difficult obstacles”.¹⁴³



Figure 12: Chatham Island horses. This pair show many thoroughbred characteristics. Betty Sylvia Wishart Album, n.d., Photos of Chatham Island relative to the Fougere, Beamish and Wishart families, Ref: PAColl-4855, Alexander Turnbull Library.

It seems some horses were more finely attuned than others. Ruth and Laurie Canter rode extensively about the island during their time there. Ruth developed a strong rapport with her mare Iona, and trusted her implicitly. At the first drop of rain, and even before Ruth noticed the changing weather, Iona would stop. She stood calmly as Ruth unstrapped a waterproof coat from the saddle, and put it on without dismounting. Iona was highly intuitive, and always alerted Ruth to bogs ahead. She would sniff, snort, and

¹⁴² Philip Cuthbert Anderson, *The Chatham Islands: With Notes of a Visit There in the Months July, August, and September, 1882* (Christchurch, N.Z.: A. Turner, 1882), 8, 9.

¹⁴³ “A Holiday at the Chathams”, *TIM*, 6 May 1905; “Six Weeks at the Chathams”.

back up, and given her head, immediately choose a safer route. Laurie had less pleasant experiences. His horse tended to career on quite recklessly, and often ended up girth-deep in bogs.¹⁴⁴ Naturally, the Canter's pace was slower when travelling with their two young children. Adopting a Māori method, a large sheet was formed into a sling, and the child safely cocooning in front of the rider. This was a comfortable arrangement, and the Canter children loved it.¹⁴⁵

The Canter's were sympathetic riders, but not everyone was of a mind to 'listen' to their horse. Some interpreted an unwillingness to move forward as blatant disobedience, and engaged in a battle of wills to force the horse forward. As a result, the horse was sometimes caught in a bog. While riders were generally unscathed, horses did suffer the consequences of rider domination. In exerting to free themselves, some sustained life-threatening injuries, or died of exhaustion in the attempt.¹⁴⁶ And even the horse's superior senses could not protect it from all island dangers. Chudleigh watched helplessly as his "splendid" Brown Bess fell into a hole of burning peat. A mob of sheep had just passed over the spot, and there was no external sign of fire, but suddenly, the crust gave way under the weight of horse and rider. As Bess fell, she "gave one mighty bound and got out before the crust dissolved into dust". The shepherd was unharmed, but the horse's hind leg was badly burnt.¹⁴⁷

Conclusion

It is difficult to gauge the sentiments of the islanders as they went about their daily lives. Evidence suggests they imbibed, rather than verbalized, a strong and unshakeable faith in environment. This silence is typical of the person on the land, who might be "profoundly aware of its beauty", yet seldom "framed" these perceptions, either graphically or in words.¹⁴⁸ However, when travelling about the island, nature was constantly in the foreground, experienced at every step, and through the senses, this place was inscribed with meaning. This sensory endowment preserved bonds with nature that were increasingly denied to many on the mainland. Unlike the visitor, whose experiences were fleeting, the Chatham Islanders had long-accepted the endlessly-

¹⁴⁴ Ruth Canter, "A Break on Development in Chatham Islands", *Auckland Weekly News*, 12 June 1946.

¹⁴⁵ Canter.

¹⁴⁶ "Chatham Islands", *Wellington Independent*, 18 April 1867; Miller, Constance, fl 1992, History of the Gascoyne Family, MS-Papers-4549, ATL.

¹⁴⁷ Chudleigh, 382. Apart from mentioning the mare might lose a hoof, Chudleigh does not mention the horse's recovery.

¹⁴⁸ Tuan, *Topophilia*, 97.

changing mood of their environment, and were perhaps assured by nature's power to renew and provide. We can only imagine those sentiments, that sense of oneness internalized by long-term residents, but it seems the sensory landscape of everyday life instilled "unbounded confidence" in their unique island world.¹⁴⁹

Attuned to the land, islanders adopted a slower pace, and shaped lives in and around their environment. This might be viewed as a melding of wills. But lives could never be entirely bounded by the shore, and at times they must travel the seas. These journeys were in marked contrast to engagements with land, and islanders were more vocal in expressing annoyance and anxiety over mainland links and travel in coastal waters. Outward forms of connection and mobility are the subject of the following chapter.

¹⁴⁹ "Chatham Island", *WA*, 22 June 1909.

Chapter 4: Travelling the Sea Roads

For the Chatham Islanders, sea links with New Zealand were of the utmost interest and concern.¹ Connecting waters were strongly influenced by turbulent weather, converging currents and unusual tides, but out of necessity, this dangerous passage of water was viewed as a bridge, or 'sea road'. This signified more than mobility, because sea roads were essential to lives and livelihoods. With few roads on the island, sea roads in coastal waters took on greater importance, to reach and service outlying settlements and sheep stations. I argue, that in the terraqueous environment of the Chathams, people were as much defined by a relationship with the sea as by the island itself. Therefore, a focus on seas, ships and harbours is crucial to this study of place and identity, to capture defining moments beyond the shore, and to fully encompass the range of lived sensory experiences.

Travel by sea road presented very different challenges to moving across the island, yet marine encounters were motivated by the same desires for mobility and exchange. With characteristic rough seas and gale force winds, the surrounding and connecting waters were often tempestuous and unpredictable.² Islanders were often forced to travel on cargo and stock carrying vessels, ill-equipped for passengers, and a passage to New Zealand was generally perceived as an unavoidable evil, an episode to be endured rather than enjoyed. Faced with wild seas, foetid conditions, and overwhelming sickness, this was often seen as a hostile transitional space. This proved an unsurmountable barrier for some, who seldom, if ever, committed to the encounter. According to John Gillis, lands are generally deemed to have "histories", whereas the sea is often assumed to exist "outside of time".³ However, as I argue, this was far from the case for Chatham Islanders. Travelling these seas in ships and boats was anything but a meaningless interlude.

Ships and shipping were crucial to the island's functioning as part of a wider world, bringing people, mail, news, and goods, and maintaining social, family, and business connections with New Zealand. The survival of scattered settlements and farms depended on vessels coming as close as possible, to load produce for exports and

¹ "Chatham Islands", *NZH*, 17 April 1893.

² Craig S. Thompson, *The Weather and Climate of the Chatham Islands*, ed. New Zealand Meteorological Service (Wellington, N.Z.: New Zealand Meteorological Service, 1983), 77, 90.

³ John R. Gillis, "Not Continents in Miniature: Islands as Ecotones," *Island Studies Journal* 9, no. 1 (2014): 157.

deliver supplies.⁴ These access points were often little more than coastal “indentations”, and as Bowen explained, this was “a tedious business” with a small sailing ship, “one attended with no little risk and anxiety”.⁵ Steam-powered vessels were not exempt from these dangers.

Driving the sea

The Chatham Islands are an extension of the New Zealand land mass, connected to the mainland by a large underwater plateau known as the Chatham Rise. Extending 1,400 kilometres east of Banks Peninsula, it ascends from the sea floor at a depth of 3,000 metres, and forms a broad ridge some 350–400 metres below the sea’s surface.⁶ This geographic feature has a significant effect on ocean currents, and the Chathams lie at its eastern extremity.

The Chatham Rise and Chatham Islands “straddle” a significant oceanic convergence, where cold, subantarctic waters from the Southland Current meet the warmer subtropical flow of the East Cape Current.⁷ The Chatham Rise impedes their progress and deflects them east.⁸ The Subtropical Convergence is prone to seasonal change, therefore the current may flow north or south of the islands.⁹ The speed of modern shipping, and navigation technology, have lessened the impact these currents might exert on the typical voyage, but in the past, and especially in the era of sail, the energy and movement of ocean water was one of the prime causes of discrepancies between the “dead reckoned” and actual positions of vessels.¹⁰

⁴ Reverend Croasdaile Bowen, Account of a visit to the Chatham Islands, 1874, Pattisson, Hoel Thornthwaite, Papers, MS-Papers-9665-2, ATL.

⁵ Bowen, 13; E. R. Chudleigh, *Diary of E.R. Chudleigh, 1862-1921: Chatham Islands*, ed. Eva Carlisle Richards (Christchurch: Simpson and Williams, 1950), 211.

⁶ Ashley Rowden, “Sea Floor - Life on the Deep Sea Floor,” in *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, accessed November 4, 2018, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/map/8953/chatham-rise>.

⁷ W. A. Nelson, *Marine Algae of the Chatham Islands: A List of Species*, ed. Nancy Mitchell Adams, et al. (Wellington, N.Z.: National Museum of New Zealand, 1991), 4-5. The land masses of New Zealand and the Chatham Islands have been separated for approximately seventy-five million years.

⁸ Andrew M. Lorrey and Helen C. Bastock, “Australasia: An Overview of Modern Climate and Paleoclimate During the Last Glacial Maximum,” in *Climate, Science, and Colonization: Histories from Australia and New Zealand*, ed. James Beattie, Matthew Henry, and Emily O’Gorman (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 22.

⁹ Nelson, 5. A range of inter-related factors or “drivers” are responsible for hazardous waters in this region. According to the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA), “the main natural causes of coastal hazards arise from extremes in weather such as storms and cycles in ocean-atmosphere response (sea level and currents)”.

¹⁰ N. Bowditch and National Imagery and Mapping Agency, *The American Practical Navigator: An Epitome of Navigation*, Bicentennial Edition, (Bethesda, Maryland: National Imagery and Mapping Agency, 2002), 433.

Other environmental “drivers” impact on marine navigation and must literally be “added to the mix”. In studying the climate of the sea surrounding the islands, Thompson noted the correlation between “ever present” wind and locally generated sea waves; termed the “sea state”, this describes the effect of local winds on sea conditions.¹¹ “Swell” refers to self-sustaining waves developed over a longer period, and over a larger area of sea. The swell in the Chathams originates in the strong westerly wind zone to the south and southwest of New Zealand, and in southwesterly airstreams that frequently flow between New Zealand and the Chathams.¹² By analysing the wind, wave and swell reports routinely made by ships in the area, Thompson established that “rough” seas were experienced 9% of the time, and “high swells” of over three metres 47% of the time.¹³ Mariners today have a greater knowledge of these dynamics. Science has explained how tidal currents occur in conjunction with rising and falling tides, and interactions with earth, sun, and moon are better understood.

In the past, the vagaries of ocean, weather and climate had a profound effect on shipping in the Chathams region, but with experience, islanders developed their own understandings. In 1894, Johannes Engst, Moravian missionary, and long-term island resident, highlighted the capricious nature of the currents and tides. He recalled an evening when his small vessel fell “in with a calm” off the south-east coast near Owenga, and by daylight, had drifted close to The Sisters, a distance of about 35 miles.¹⁴ Engst provided a layman’s insight into these peculiar waters, to explain why so many ships were lost “on or about” the group.

Tides there behaved quite differently to “a general ocean tide”, with the ebb and flood of converging currents influencing navigation in a ten to fifteen-mile radius. “Flood” tides split to the south side of the group and ran along the east and west shore until joining again on the north side. Conversely, the ebb tide split on the north side, and ran reverse on the two shores until it joined on the south side”. The flood tide would set a vessel northward, while the ebb tide sent it south. According to Engst, “any sailing ship which comes into these limits, by foggy weather or calm, or by night, most surely comes to grief”.¹⁵

¹¹ Thompson, 28. These were predominantly from a south, southwest, or northerly direction

¹² Ibid. Different craft react differently to wind waves and swell.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Henry Brett, *White Wings*, vol. 1, Fifty Years of Sail in the New Zealand Trade 1850 to 1900 (Auckland: Brett, 1924), 97.

¹⁵ Ibid. “Flood” tide refers to the rising tide, and ebb to the receding.

Shipwrecks linked to Chatham's history have often featured in sensationalized accounts of sea-going tragedies. Storms and sudden wind changes took their toll, but given the region's overwhelming tides and currents, "falling in with a calm" proved equally hazardous. As early as 1866, the region had an unenviable reputation as "a most unlucky spot for maritime craft", as vessels were lost there at a frightening rate. Inhabitants might be "startled" at any hour of the day or night by "unfortunate mariners", who had endured and survived some calamity.¹⁶ In 1922, a Pacific handbook spoke alarmingly of "treacherous tides and winds and rocks in this out-of-the-world place", which had "proved the death-bed of too many a stately ship and her gallant crew".¹⁷ In 1924, an Australian journalist claimed "Beware of the Chathams" as a slogan "well-known to seamen the world over". He believed there was good reason for this fear, as since 1839, 41 vessels had been lost in these waters.¹⁸

Mariners with experience in these waters advised ships out of New Zealand bound for Cape Horn to "give these islands a wide berth".¹⁹ This was the intention of *Jessie Readman*, bound for London in 1893. However, overnight, and without the knowledge of the captain, "fog, weather and tide" carried the ship six miles off course. By morning it was wrecked on Taupeka beach, the fifth to come to grief along a twenty-mile stretch of coastline. All were attributed to the overwhelming force of local tides and currents.²⁰

Ocean links

Many ships were damaged or wrecked while plying their trade with the Chathams, but nonetheless, the islands were well-served by coastal shipping during the nineteenth century, especially given the small population, and limited return freight on offer.²¹ From about 1805, ships from Australia and New Zealand brought sealers, and traffic increased significantly with whaling activity in the area. From 1835, ships from foreign ports regularly called for supplies. In 1840, New Zealand Company naturalist Dieffenbach recorded 30 whaling vessels at Waitangi alone, and in addition to this many

¹⁶ "The Chatham Islands", *LT*, 21 July 1866.

¹⁷ P.S. Allen, *Stewart's Hand Book of the Pacific Islands* (McCarron, Stewart & Company, 1922), 7.

¹⁸ Henry Bateson, "Isle of Disappearing Ships", *Sun* (Sydney, NSW), 17 August 1924. There are conflicting estimates as to the number of shipwrecks.

¹⁹ Brett, 1, 97. "The Jessie Readman Wreck", *NZT*, 22 February 1894.

²⁰ "The Jessie Readman Wreck", *ibid*.

²¹ Rhys Richards, "An Historical Geography of Chatham Island" (MA, University of Canterbury, New Zealand, 1962), 90.

American whalers visited Pitt Island.²² Ships from Sydney brought clothes, tobacco, and horses to trade, and from the late 1850s, potatoes were a staple export for both Māori and Pākehā. Large quantities of produce were shipped to Sydney, Melbourne, and Hobart, and on several occasions, traders supplied the Californian goldfields.²³ Richards noted a decline in whaling from 1864, and the termination of the industry in 1887. From 1856, a number of small sailing vessels carried produce to the four main ports in New Zealand, and following the discovery of gold in 1861 much was destined for the goldfields.²⁴ There was little direct trade with foreign ports after this time.²⁵ From 1875, vessels were larger and less frequent, and most sailed from Lyttelton.²⁶ During the twentieth century, even larger steam and motor-driven ships brought supplies, and transported livestock to New Zealand markets.²⁷

The Chatham Islands were one of the first places in New Zealand to suffer from the decline of coastal shipping.²⁸ From the 1880s, as larger steamships took over coastal trade between major New Zealand ports, minor ports were relegated to feeder services.²⁹ On the mainland, the greater speed and regularity of steamships permitted timetabled freight and passenger services, along with improvements to wharves and cargo handling facilities.³⁰ The Chathams' service remained relatively unchanged. Some vessels still arrived on speculative trading voyages, including the occasional steamer, and although more regular services existed from time to time, until 1950, shipping generally remained erratic and unreliable. Unless vessels were chartered by islanders, sailing schedules remained "completely haphazard".³¹ Sail was not superseded on this route until the first decade of the twentieth century, and even then, the replacement of sail by steam "did not in itself provide an adequate service".³²

²² Ibid., 118. Ernest Dieffenbach, "An Account of the Chatham Islands," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 11 (1841): 125.

²³ Noel Robert Archibald Cox, Papers relating to the history and ethnology of the Chatham Islands, MS-0964/001, Hocken Collections, Dunedin.

²⁴ Richards, 118.

²⁵ John A. Robertson, "Chatham Islands," in *Proceedings and Transactions of the Queensland Branch of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, Queensland* (Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, Queensland, 1889), 82. Rhys Richards mentions the export of sheep to Fiji in 1878 to 1880.

²⁶ Richards, *ibid.*

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 90.

²⁹ Statistics New Zealand, "Yearbook Collection: 1893–2012," (1990). https://www3.stats.govt.nz/New_Zealand_Official_Yearbooks/1990/NZOYB_1990.html.

³⁰ James Watson, *Links: A History of Transport and New Zealand Society*, ed. New Zealand Ministry of Transport and New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs, Historical Branch (Wellington, N.Z.: Ministry of Transport, 1996), 96.

³¹ Richards, 118–19.

³² Ibid., 118; Fiona Holmes, *Chatham Islands Rekohu, 1791–1984* (Waitangi, Chatham Islands: Self-published, 1984), 35.

Different stories

One major drawback to shipping connections with the Chatham Islands was the lack of safe harbours. In 1840, Dieffenbach compiled an optimistic account of anchorages, based on his own observations, and the reports of whalers and sealers.³³ Whangaroa Bay (Port Hutt) was deep and sheltered, providing a small, but “most secure harbour”. In other respects, the area was “somewhat unpromising”; the bay was encircled by “undulating, boggy moor”, and the area was completely devoid of wood.³⁴ Ships favoured Waitangi, some ten miles distant, to take on provisions and water. Although the anchorage was open to the north-west wind, conditions gave Dieffenbach no cause for concern during his time there. He noted one area of beach with “no surf at all”; the water was “constantly smooth”, and cargo could “be landed at all times”.³⁵

Captain Hope of H.M.S.S. *Brisk* had a very different story to tell, and his experiences highlight the inadequate charting of marine hazards. *Brisk* arrived at the Chathams in May 1865, to search for survivors of a missing ship. Hope soon discovered inaccuracies in marine surveys, identifying discrepancies of up to six miles between his reckonings and positions recorded on admiralty charts. He dutifully recorded all observable hazards, and his report was published in “The Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle” the following year. However, no information related to the Chathams appeared in the “New Zealand Pilot” until the fifth edition of 1883.³⁶

Hope was clearly more alert to potential dangers because he experienced less favourable conditions than Dieffenbach. While anchored at Waitangi, he and his crew endured a stressful 48 hours at the hands of “a perfect hurricane”, with “a high breaking sea” flowing into the open harbour, and repeatedly washing over the ship.³⁷ The starboard anchor failed, and despite using steam power to compensate, the ship lay in a very vulnerable position for some time. Conditions were worsened by a “strong offset” from the shore, which kept it “broadside to wind and sea”. Fortunately, the cables held, otherwise *Brisk* would surely have gone ashore.³⁸ This frightening scenario, where a

³³ Dieffenbach, 198.

³⁴ “Description of the Chatham Islands”, *New Zealand Gazette and Wellington Spectator*, 25 July 1840.

³⁵ Dieffenbach, 198.

³⁶ *The Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle for 1866*, Cambridge Library Collection (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 47-50. Great Britain. Hydrographic Dept, *The New Zealand Pilot* (J. D. Potter, 1883), 376-86. This was first published in 1832. Hope’s comments, added in 1866, provided the only truly beneficial information to mariners. This publication also includes an account of Broughton’s visit in 1791 and Dieffenbach’s in 1940, both of which focus primarily on descriptions of the land and its inhabitants, rather than marine safety.

³⁷ “Cruise of H.M.S.S. *Brisk*”, *NZH*, 1 June 1865.

³⁸ Ibid

hapless ship was pitted against conflicting waves and currents, was often repeated at Waitangi. Many were not as fortunate as *Brisk*.

Contrary to Dieffenbach's claim, Waitangi proved a consistently dangerous harbour for all classes of ships, especially for larger vessels anchoring further from the shore. When gales arose from the west or north-west, a "terrific sea" was forced into the bay. This created a powerful "rush and drawback", making it impossible for ships to "work out". Anchors and chains were sorely tested, and if these proved defective, "no earthly providence can save them; they must go ashore".³⁹

At the mercy of nature

Nineteenth century travellers understood that sailing ships were at the mercy of nature. Under fair conditions, a skilful mariner might work in partnership with the environment, harnessing its energies, and making headway. This partnership ceased to exist under foul conditions, and control was lost. During stressful interactions, the forces of nature are often represented as the protagonist in some sea-going drama, and the environment characterized by its ever-changing moods. Nature plays the role of villain or hero, adversary or friend, evil or blessing. Sometimes it is volatile and angry, a tormentor and relentless bully. At other times, it is calm and gentle, beneficent and beautiful, only to be revealed as a master of deceit and disguise, playing "curious pranks" with deadly consequences.⁴⁰

Those who observed ships and shipping in the Chathams noted a prevailing sense of helplessness and unpredictability.⁴¹ A voyage by sail occupied from three days to three weeks, and the ship might be at the Chathams over three months before completing its tasks.⁴² Working the bays and roadsteads to the north and west of Chatham Island was "distinctly dangerous", and often "accomplished at considerable risk".⁴³ This was only possible when the wind was off shore, and if this changed, the vessel must immediately "stand out to sea", or seek shelter on the other side of the island.⁴⁴ It was impossible to predict when nature would again comply, and hence, "a glorious state of uncertainty" always existed.⁴⁵ This took its toll on ships crews; "with

³⁹ "The Chatham Islands", *LT*, 21 July 1866.

⁴⁰ "Isle of Disappearing Ships".

⁴¹ Bowen, 13. Robertson, 88. "Chatham Island News", *SR*, 22 July 1889.

⁴² Robertson, *ibid.*, 77, 90.

⁴³ Robertson, *ibid.*, 88. Venerable Archdeacon Grace's Journey, *Marlborough Express*, 28 February 1912. A "roadstead" is defined as a place less enclosed than a harbour where ships may ride at anchor.

⁴⁴ Robertson, *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Robertson, *ibid.* Bowen, 13; "Chatham Island News", *SR*, 22 July 1889.

no true harbour to lie in ... they can never tell from hour to hour how long they might remain at the same anchorage".⁴⁶

Working the Chathams trade put extraordinary stress on ships and crews. In 1871, John Thomson, a ship owner from Dunedin, made a speculative trading voyage, his one and only venture to the Chathams. It is not difficult to see why. While working the precarious boat harbours around the island, the crew narrowly escaped being shipwrecked. Thomson was convinced the ship was "as tight as a cup", but the harsh conditions may have taken their toll, as *Redcliff* began to leak furiously on the return voyage. Preparations were made to abandon ship, but "salvation" came in the form of Holloway, a sailor to all appearances "as rough and careless as the rest of us".⁴⁷ Standing at the bow, he gazed upwards and ahead, "singing in clear though tremulous tones that beautiful hymn 'Thy Will Be Done'".⁴⁸

This unexpected display of "deep religious spirit" had a notable effect on all, allaying fears and bringing calm and resignation. Miraculously, the leak was found and despair "literally turned to laughter".⁴⁹ Just as repairs were completed, a heavy gale set in. For ten days, *Redcliff* rode mountainous seas, and by the time New Zealand was sighted, men and supplies were exhausted. In the dark of night, they found themselves surrounded by floating wreckage from *Ahuriri*, a steamer that had come to grief the day before.⁵⁰ This was a poignant reminder of their own redemption, and of the ever-present danger on the sea.

In 1882, the Reverend Anderson experienced the frustrations and dangers of sailing in a trading vessel. He boarded *Omaha*, which was about to sail to Pitt Island to collect sheep, before returning to Auckland.⁵¹ Anderson went ashore at Pitt, but unfavourable winds forced the ship away at short notice, leaving him stranded. *Omaha* returned five days later, and going aboard in heavy seas, he retreated to his bunk, thoroughly wet, cold, and unwell.⁵² His discomfort was not eased for some time. The ship was assailed by heavy gales, "in quick succession, from every point of the compass, with heavy rain and hail". Some of the sails were carried away, and had several burly

⁴⁶ Bowen, 24-25.

⁴⁷ J. Inches Thomson, *Voyages and Wanderings in Far-Off Seas and Lands* (London: Headley Brothers, 1910), 55-56.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁵¹ Philip Cuthbert Anderson, *The Chatham Islands: With Notes of a Visit There in the Months July, August, and September, 1882* (Christchurch, N.Z.: A. Turner, 1882), 25.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 22, 26-27. The passengers enjoyed the hospitality of the Hunt family while on Pitt Island.

passengers not joined the crew, the ship would surely have been lost.⁵³ On that occasion, *Omaha* took twelve weeks to complete the round trip.

Anderson was fortunate his time on Pitt Island was so short. Four years later, the Reverend Wyatt of Canterbury “went down” to the Chathams for the “usual visitation”. Many travellers referred to “going down” to the Chathams, a curious term that connotes a similar fate to a prisoner being “sent down”. This was certainly the case for Wyatt, who was kept “prisoner” there for 15 weeks, eight weeks of that time stranded on Pitt Island.⁵⁴ After a four-month absence from New Zealand, the government steamer was sent to the Chathams to search for *Omaha*.⁵⁵

Even experienced mariners with a good working knowledge of the Chathams coastline came to grief. The captain and mate of *Island Lily* were confident in their ability to “read” the tides and currents, until losing the vessel in 1885. For some unknown reason, when leaving Te Raki, the current “set a little earlier than usual”.⁵⁶ Normally this would not be a problem, but on this day the wind suddenly dropped. They could do nothing to stop the strong current carrying the vessel onto an unidentified reef.⁵⁷ The admiralty chart on board was no help in this situation, as it was nothing more than an outline plan, with no indication of rocks and tides.⁵⁸

Purgatory

Many travellers on the Chatham’s route spoke of rough passages, cramped accommodation, and horrendous smells on board the ship. It seems this experience had a significant impact on the Chatham Islanders, who complained more about woeful experiences on the sea than problems encountered going over land. Vessels seldom offered both cabin and steerage accommodation, and passenger comfort was almost always a secondary consideration to cargo.⁵⁹ The facilities reflected this. In 1883, Lyne arrived by *Island Lily*. Even after months at sea on the voyage from London, nothing could prepare him for the final leg. The “after part” of the hold was enclosed as a cabin; this had no portholes or ventilation other than the hatch, which was kept closed in rough weather. There was only enough room for 12 bunks in two tiers. Lyne’s passage was

⁵³ Ibid., 27-28.

⁵⁴ “The Chatham Islands”, *Temuka Leader*, 17 August 1886; “News of the Omaha”, *PR*, 14 August 1886.

⁵⁵ “The Cruise of the Stella”, *EP*, 14 August 1886.

⁵⁶ “Wreck of the Brigantine Island Lily at Chatham Islands”, *TIM*, 20 January 1885.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ “Shipping”, *LT*, 5 August 1865; “The Chatham Islands”, *SR*, 24 January 1902.

interminably long, over ten days, and when recalling the event some 75 years later, he wrote, “the reek of that black hole lingers with me still”.⁶⁰

Chudleigh was one of the most well-travelled island residents. By 1878, after 12 years living on the island, he had undertaken 29 journeys. He seldom describes the actual voyage, or mentions his fellow passengers, but almost always refers to his level of shipboard suffering. His words were generally brief, but meaningful. In 1868, his diary simply recorded, “sick sick sick always”.⁶¹ On landing at Kaingaroa the following year, he felt very ill, “having been seasick all day and every day”.⁶² Delaying his return to Wharekauri, he recovered at the Shand’s home at Te Whakuru.⁶³ Again in 1878, he “got out of purgatory” by disembarking at Whangaroa and walking home.⁶⁴ Weeks later he was still unwell. His diary recorded, “ill as usual after a voyage ... the foul air and miserable food in these little stock carrying ships is enough to poison anyone.”⁶⁵

Less than three months later Chudleigh was aboard the *Omaha* again, along with a cargo of horses, wool, and skins. “We slept as usual right on top of it all. Horses on one side, skins on the other, a rare stink, at times enough to kill a dog”.⁶⁶ One return voyage in 1878 was notable, as Chudleigh was spared the sickness, “but oh the stench of the ship ... it is not the ordinary ship smell. The captain says it licks everything and what it is he cannot tell”.⁶⁷ Feeling brighter on this occasion, Chudleigh paid attention to the condition of his fellow passengers, and Alexander Shand in particular. At the beginning of the voyage, Shand had tried “to do the old tar”, but soon grew “sea sick and quiet ... gave it up and retired”.⁶⁸ When the ship reached land at Taupeka, all but one passenger went ashore, only too “glad to get off the ship” before reaching their final destination. Chudleigh took Shand to his home nearby to recover.⁶⁹

Passengers on the Chathams route generally found accommodation wanting. The cabin on *Ocean Wave* was so cramped, in 1874, the Reverend Bowen preferred to sleep on deck.⁷⁰ The captain’s cabin was given over to two “ladies” and a baby; this was often

⁶⁰ Robert Nunez Lyne, *The Chathams in the 1880's* (Bath, England: Self-published, 1948), 6.

⁶¹ Chudleigh, 223. Chudleigh seldom punctuated his diary entries.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 261.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 268.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 281.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* “Old tar” is used to describe an experienced mariner.

⁶⁹ Chudleigh, 282.

⁷⁰ Bowen, 1.

the case, as this was the most private and comfortable space on board.⁷¹ When Anderson sailed on *Omaha* in 1885, everyone was seasick regardless of accommodation. “The sea was uncommonly lumpy and rough all the voyage”, he wrote, “and so increased our miseries largely; for however much one may joke about sea-sickness, it is surely the acme of misery, especially when one is cramped up in a small vessel, bowling along over a cross sea in half a gale of wind”.⁷² Thankfully, favourable winds returned, permitting a “splendid three days’ run down”.⁷³ On landing, the vicar was immediately spirited away by Samuel Deighton, RM, to the “perfect calm and quiet” of his residence. Anderson spent several days resting and recuperating from the “buffeting and racket” of the voyage.⁷⁴

Amy Hellaby never forgot her departure from the Chathams. In 1875, the eleven-year-old was sent to boarding school in New Zealand. The vessel was leaving from Pitt Island, and could only be reached by whaleboat across the open water of Pitt Strait. Coming alongside, the boatman endeavoured to catch a line, but the sea was too rough, and the vessel swept by many times. After “an hour of exasperating delay” the line was finally caught, and passengers climbed the ladder slung over the ship’s side. Amy recalled her limbs were so numb with cold she could barely clamber aboard.⁷⁵

Just as visitors commented on the absence of roads on Chatham Island, and the antiquated forms of land transport, “primitive” landing arrangements were also criticized.⁷⁶ Visitors often described disembarking at Waitangi. The ship anchored about a quarter of a mile from the shore, and a surf boat was lowered.⁷⁷ Passengers climbed in, and were rowed as close to the landing place as possible without running aground.⁷⁸ They must then spring from the boat to the beach, or be carried on the backs of the crew. This was described as, “most uncomfortable and undignified”, especially for women.⁷⁹ A small jetty built in 1897 proved less useful than expected, because as Grove noted in 1901, the “little cockle-shell of a steamer” dared not come alongside in rough conditions. When he arrived, the ship was forced to “clear away”, and shelter for three

⁷¹ Bowen, 1. “Chatham Islands”, *NZH*, 23 April 1894.

⁷² Anderson, 7.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Amy Hellaby, “Early Days in the Chatham Islands,” in *Tales of Pioneer Women*, ed. Airini E. Woodhouse (Auckland: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1940), 265.

⁷⁶ A. J. Blakiston, *My Yesteryears* (Timaru N.Z.: Timaru Herald, 1952), 33; “A Chat About Chatham Island”, *PR*, 10 September 1897.

⁷⁷ “A Chat About Chatham Island”.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*; “The Chatham Islands”, *TIM*, 25 October 1894.

days in the lee of the island until the wind changed and seas calmed.⁸⁰ This was a regular occurrence. Grove found the surf boat method difficult enough in daylight, and a “very unpleasant experience” at night time.⁸¹ In 1918, passengers were still being rowed to the jetty at Waitangi. This was the only port to offer even that level of “comfort”, but in rough seas, everyone was “liable to a soaking” regardless.⁸² A substantial wharf was built in 1934, but even this did not solve all the port’s problems.

Under steam

Throughout the nineteenth century, ship builders adapted the steam engine as an independent energy source, and “helped to create a whole new world”.⁸³ Their greatest advantage over sail was the capacity to make headway in total calm or opposing winds.⁸⁴ Steamers became larger and faster, and their “ability to sail on the tide, to schedule, and maintain a consistent speed” was considered “a genuine revolution”.⁸⁵ In this “rational age of science and progress”, it was believed that “Mother Nature” was acquiescing to human control, and as Katie Pickles notes, “then, as now, there was a growing tension between ascendancy over nature versus partnership with it”.⁸⁶ The steamship was expected to show some mastery over the environment, and the accounts of passengers on the Chathams route reflect these changing sentiments. Those travelling by steamer pay greater attention to the ship itself, on how well it “behaves” in the water, and the strength it exerts against the forces of nature. The vessel assumes an adversarial role, in a battle against the elements. In these waters, some find the steamer’s performance lacking, and their confidence misplaced.

In 1887, the 70-ton steamer *Kahu* replaced *Island Lily* and *Omaha*, sailing vessels wrecked at the Chathams. *Kahu* provided a semi-regular service throughout the year, and made numerous trips in quick succession during the summer months.⁸⁷ Known locally as the “wool-trips”, these allowed islanders to make short visits to Christchurch,

⁸⁰ “Chatham Island”, *EP*, 20 July 1901.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² “The Chatham Islands”, *PR*, 7 September 1918.

⁸³ Martin Stopford, “How Shipping Changed the World,” in *Global Maritime Environmental Congress* (SMM Hamburg 2010), 4.

⁸⁴ Watson, 94.

⁸⁵ Stopford, 4. “Sailing on the tide” means the ship was powerful enough to sail against an incoming tide.

⁸⁶ Katie Pickles, “Postcolonial Environments,” in *Making a New Land: Environmental Histories of New Zealand*, ed. Eric Pawson and Tom Brooking (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2013), 262-63.

⁸⁷ “The Daily Telegraph”, *Daily Telegraph*, 10 January 1887; “The Chatham Islands”, *AMBA*, 25 January 1887.

and visitors to enjoy a short stay on the islands.⁸⁸ As Lyne noted, “we in the Chathams were elated at the prospect of being served by a steamer and complete the voyage to New Zealand in three or four days instead of two or three weeks”.⁸⁹ But as he soon learned, steam vessels were faster, but not necessarily any more comfortable on this route. His first passage on *Kahu* was a great disappointment. He kept to his bunk the first two days, “reflecting soberly by now that in some respects the small windjammers were more suitable for ocean travel than a steam-launch”, and felt extremely ill throughout the four day voyage.⁹⁰ But admittedly, “we did not pause to consider whether an outsized steam-launch was a suitable vessel for crossing a considerable stretch of the Pacific Ocean”.⁹¹

Captain Romeril and the crew of *Kahu* did everything possible to make the voyage comfortable for passengers, but the ship had a reputation for “rolling” (figure 13). In spite of negative comments, the vessel was considered good and sturdy, and generally “tossed through it safely”.⁹² Arthur Blakiston first travelled to the Chathams in 1893, and seeing *Kahu* sitting alongside the Lyttelton wharf, thought the ship “looked very small”. But he took confidence in the boats “good engines”, which “could plough through any sea”.⁹³ He slept in a surf boat on the deck, “a vast improvement on the varied collection of smells in the cabins below”.⁹⁴

The passenger accommodation on *Kahu* often drew criticism.⁹⁵ A local correspondent declared it totally unsuited to lady passengers, claiming,

the usual discomforts a poor woman has to endure on board a steamer ... amounts to positive misery on the *Kahu*. The absence of a stewardess, and all the conveniences and privacy usually provided for ladies and children, together with the scant room of four hard and narrow bunks being crowded into a cabin only six feet square, combine to produce about as much suffering and misery as can possibly be endured by anyone for the sixty hours of unhappiness that the voyage to New Zealand takes.⁹⁶

⁸⁸ Major F. J. W. Gascoyne, *Soldiering in New Zealand* (London: T. J. S. Guilford and Company, Ltd., 1916), 145. <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-GasSold-t1-body-d12.html>. Miller, Constance, fl. 1992. History of the Gascoyne Family, MS-Papers-4549, ATL.

⁸⁹ Lyne, 39.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² “The Chatham Islands”, *AMBA*, 25 January 1887.

⁹³ Blakiston, 33.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ “Chatham Islands”, *NZH*, 23 April 1894.

He admonished the owners and marine authorities for allowing these vessels to carry passengers, “without the most ordinary provision for the necessities of the unhappy women obliged to travel by her”.⁹⁷

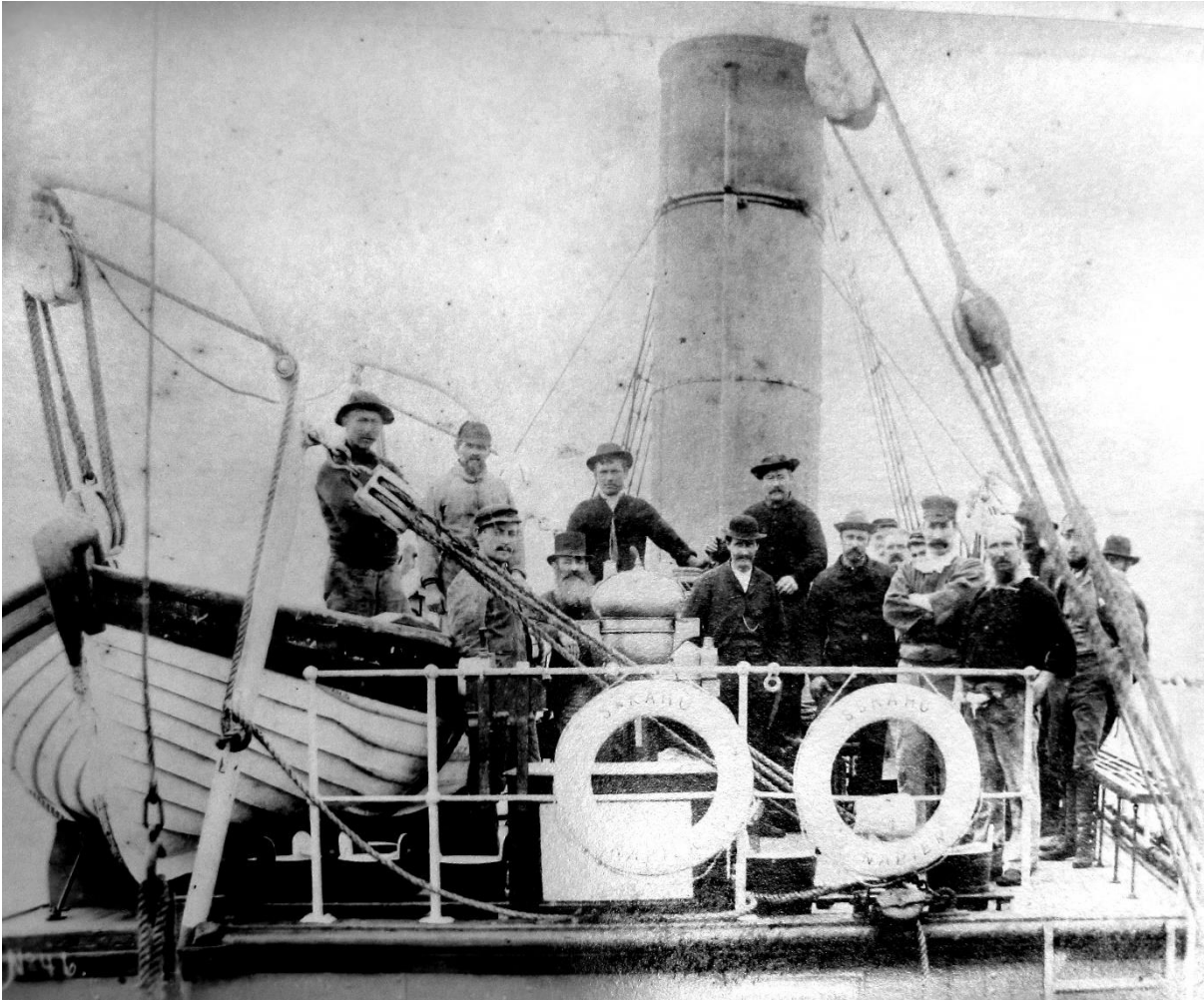


Figure 13: Captain George Romeril and the crew of s.s. *Kahu* c. 1890. Standing to the right of Romeril, wearing a top hat, is Louis Walter Hood, the shipping agent resident on the island. Karl Gerstenkorn. George Romeril Album, Photographs relating to Chatham Islands, PA1-o-1333-39, Alexander Turnbull Library.

In 1891, Bishop Julius described a “dreadful trip” on *Kahu*.⁹⁸ Extremely rough seas on the return voyage meant he was battened down below deck for his own safety. With no ventilation, and at close confines with a cargo of pigs, he was “very ill indeed”.⁹⁹ Later, in a public lecture, the Bishop jokingly noted the date of his departure, appropriately, “it

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Miller.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

was the first of April”.¹⁰⁰ He considered himself a good sailor before “that trip on the Kahu”, but now, he would “rather change the subject”.¹⁰¹ The audience laughed at his humorous account of the return passage, contending with strong head winds, a large “head sea”, and “a cargo of sheep and pigs and a baby”.¹⁰² In private, however, the Bishop was not so light-hearted about the experience, and where possible, preferred to make the voyage in the government steamer.¹⁰³

Poor accommodation, turbulent seas, and the suffering endured on a passage did little to create a good impression. Commentary often took a mocking or deprecating tone, which would hardly encourage casual visitors. In 1899, the new steamer *Toroa* entered the Chathams service. Some residents hoped their islands would soon become “a favourite holiday resort”.¹⁰⁴ The scathing comments made by T.E. Taylor, MHR, in 1903, were hardly encouraging.¹⁰⁵ Taylor was a frequent steamer passenger between the South and North Islands, and had also enjoyed an extended sea voyage, “upon a modern floating city”.¹⁰⁶ Given the speed and comfort of modern steamships, he naively believed sea-sickness was a thing of the past.¹⁰⁷ As *Toroa* translated to “young albatross”, he envisaged a “heavenly” flight over 500 miles of ocean, rather than the “extended agony” endured.¹⁰⁸ According to Taylor, nature shunned any partnership with *Toroa*, and in fact, its various elements joined forces to defeat the ship. For five days, the ship danced “a sort of marine haka”, and the “cry of Land Ho! came as a joyful sound to all”.¹⁰⁹ Taylor’s first sight of the islands was awe-inspiring, but intimidating, and his description would likely instil fear in the would-be traveller. “I had a magnificent view of Sentry Reefs”, he wrote, where “the full stroke of the ocean and the swirl of the tide running through Pitt Strait contended with the reef”. Here, “a beautiful but merciless looking column of white spray” rose 60 feet in the air.¹¹⁰ Doubtless, “human strength, skill, or prayer ... would prove fruitless to the mariner cast on to this

¹⁰⁰ “The Chathams”, *SR*, 13 May 1891.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Miller.

¹⁰⁴ “The Chatham Islands”, *PR*, 13 June 1899.

¹⁰⁵ MHR is an abbreviation for Member of the New Zealand House of Representatives, a term used between the 1860s and 1907.

¹⁰⁶ “Trip to the Chathams”, *Poverty Bay Herald* (hereafter PBH), 16 May 1903.

¹⁰⁷ Watson, 96-97

¹⁰⁸ “Trip to the Chathams”, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

sinister reef”, yet, “it is most beautiful in its angriest mood, but it is a repellent beauty”.¹¹¹

Like many other outsider reports, Taylor’s words are often veiled with wit and humour, but his account of “romping seas” leaves the reader in no doubt about the discomfort and potential risks involved in a voyage to the Chathams. These “tortures” were reinforced by a funny story circulating in Lyttelton at that time. During a lesson in dictation at a local school, one pupil allegedly wrote,

While on the tide! we gently float,
And groan to the deep seas echoing note.

“Chant! boy, not groan,” snapped the teacher, to which the boy replied — “Please sir, I have been to the Chatham Island on the Toroa.” “Ah!” said the teacher, “in that case it is ‘groan’”.¹¹²

Needs must

Balancing the needs of farmers, fishing companies and passengers was an ongoing problem for the Chatham Islanders. From 1910, larger vessels were used on the Chathams run, to accommodate an increase in cargo and exports.¹¹³ In 1911, the Chatham Islands Fishing Company began a regular service with *Himitangi*. Passenger accommodation was far from salubrious, giving the impression the owners would rather have cargo, and passengers were a concession on their part.¹¹⁴ Some described passenger accommodation as reasonable.¹¹⁵ However, as always, “regular” in the Chathams’ context was something of a misnomer. The service was always unpredictable, as Reverend Fraer noted in 1913. “There is, first of all”, he wrote, “the more or less delightful uncertainty of the time of your departure from New Zealand. Bags must be packed at a moment’s notice. Arrival time was equally uncertain, as anywhere between 60 and 90 hours was allowed.”¹¹⁶

Giving seven years of service, *Himitangi*’s eventful record shows the vulnerability of steamers in Chatham waters. When the ship ran aground in Petre Bay in 1912,

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Lindsay Butterfield and Michael Pryce, “Chatham Islands’ Shipping,” *Marine News* 50, no. 3 (2002): 110.

¹¹⁴ “Chatham Islands”, *Clutha Leader*, 22 March 1918. *Himitangi* had a cargo-carrying capacity of 323 tons (328 tonne).

¹¹⁵ “Chatham Islands Trade”, *PR*, 26 May 1911; “S.S. Himitangi Changes Hands”, *DOM*, 13 May 1911.

¹¹⁶ “Life in the Chathams”, *PR*, 25 March 1913.

passengers and crew simply dropped overboard and walked ashore.¹¹⁷ Again, in 1914, no one was harmed when the propeller was destroyed on a submerged rock at Taupeka. Finally, in 1918, *Himitangi* was completely wrecked on the Monau (or North-west) Reef.¹¹⁸ During a squall, the ship had succumbed to a strong “northerly inset”, and its landward drift went undetected in the darkness.¹¹⁹

Chartered in 1919, *Kahu* made one last trip, but on this occasion its good engines were literally extinguished.¹²⁰ Battling gales and heavy seas, the storm reached “fury point” some 70 miles from the islands. Engine room and cabins soon flooded, and discomfort turned to fear when the ship started leaking at an alarming rate. Passengers went through “a night of terror”, with everyone, including three women passengers, baling for their lives. Seawater extinguished the boiler-room fires, but rather than take to the lifeboat, baling continued at “high pressure”.¹²¹ By noon the following day, conditions were improved enough to the relight the fires, and while all on board were exhausted, baling continued until *Kahu* ran aground at full speed on the beach at Whangaroa, in “a sinking state”.¹²²

By the 1930s, those who travelled to the Chathams still considered them “uncomfortably far removed from the big sister land for the squeamish person who must voyage there on official or commercial duty”.¹²³ This was a horrifying prospect for school inspector, Archibald Denne, who was dismayed to learn it was his turn to “do the Chathams” in 1934.¹²⁴ Denne understood that passengers took “to their bunks as soon as they go on board and hope the trouble will soon be over”, because as he explained,

The *Tees* was used for transporting sheep and frozen fish and her aroma was not one that soothed a queasy stomach especially when fortified with the stale smell of cooking from the ship's galley. Added to this nauseating atmosphere was the disagreeable behaviour of the vessel itself. She was built to carry stock and designed to ship as little sea as possible. A cork could not have been more nimble in the water. I counted as many as five motions, some simultaneous, some in quick succession, which even the most experienced of the crew found it difficult to cope with. She would roll and rise at the same time, then suddenly lurch to the opposite side and

¹¹⁷ “Himitangi Safe”, *DOM*, 7 March 1912. “An Eye-Witness's Description”, *Marlborough Express*, 7 March 1912.

¹¹⁸ “Himitangi Repaired”, *Hawera & Normanby Star*, 20 January 1914.

¹¹⁹ Loss of Himitangi, *EP*, 30 August 1918.

¹²⁰ Ernest Langdale-Hunt, *The Last Entail Male* (Christchurch, N.Z.: E. Langdale-Hunt, 1985), 62.

¹²¹ “At the Mercy of a Gale”, *DOM*, 10 November 1919; Langdale-Hunt, 62. There were 13 crew and 13 passengers on board.

¹²² Langdale-Hunt, 63.

¹²³ “Chatham Islands”, *AS*, 25 March 1933.

¹²⁴ Archibald Harry Denne, 1900-1972, *Reminiscences, Papers*, MS-Papers-10887, ATL.

swerve. Then she would sink down, shudder, and then flap like a flounder when flipped out of the net onto the beach. Then she would cock up her stern till the propeller came out of the water and whirred in a frenzy that seemed likely to disembowel the ship. The only thing to do was to stay in the bunk and read something that would make one more or less oblivious to the turmoil of the environment.¹²⁵



Figure 14: *Tees* almost ready to leave, c. 1936. William B. Burt, private collection of Bryce Shirtcliffe.

A sturdy wharf had recently been built at Waitangi, and Denne was looking forward to using it. To his disappointment, the ship anchored further out. This caution was due to a recent incident, when the trawler *South Sea* was tied up at the wharf overnight. A “sudden high surge” rolled in, lifting the boat above the level of the wharf, and snapping the hawsers “like packthread”.¹²⁶ Ship’s captains were unwilling to risk damage to vessels or the new wharf. Denne went ashore in the customary manner, “perched on

¹²⁵ “Chatham Islands”, *AS*, 25 March 1933.

¹²⁶ Denne, 52

mail-bags, and odds and ends of luggage”, and clambered from the ships launch up an iron ladder and onto the wharf.¹²⁷

Singularly Unfortunate

According to a newspaper report, between 1841 and 1866, at least 60 lives were lost around the Chatham coast, some by shipwreck, but the majority through boat accidents. Poor reporting during this period means this number cannot be substantiated, but most agreed the Chathams were “singularly unfortunate” in this regard.¹²⁸ The risks of travelling in coastal waters were well known, nevertheless, sea roads around Chatham Island were sometimes taken in preference to overland journeys. In 1866, Robert Williams of Te Raki, an old experienced seaman, unwisely agreed to use his unseaworthy whaleboat to help a neighbouring farmer. Five people set out on the return voyage from Waitangi, along with a load of supplies. The day was fine and calm, but the boat suddenly disappeared off Whangaroa. Islanders believed it literally broke to pieces, taking the lives of all on board.¹²⁹

In June 1894, Chudleigh was mourning the loss of two young station hands. Without his knowledge, they were bringing a boat across Te Whanga Lagoon, and intended to carry it to Wharekauri to use as coastal transport. Chudleigh would never have sanctioned such a scheme, as he opposed the use of boats on such a dangerous coast, especially by “raw hands”. He had used a boat in earlier years, when it was the only way of getting goods to the station, but his was a three-ton boat, crewed by five to seven old whalers, and even then “it was often a run for life ... these raw boys could only be drowned”.¹³⁰ The sad irony was this happened on the lagoon before they even reached the sea.

Eighteen years later, in 1912, Chudleigh watched small fishing launches fairly flying along the coast, and mused that nearly within his memory, Moriori *korari* or basket work canoes had made their way slowly through these waters. Clearly, the use of motors in addition to sail gave islanders a new sense of empowerment on the water, giving greater ability to negotiate fluctuating conditions. Tragically, in July 1931, this confidence proved unfounded. The entire island community mourned the loss of 11 fishermen near Kaingaroa, following the worst boating tragedy in Māori and European

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ “The Chatham Islands”, *Otago Witness*, 27 October 1866.

¹²⁹ “Chatham Islands”, *Wellington Independent*, 20 October 1866.

¹³⁰ Chudleigh, 386-87.

history. The men set off in the launch *Te Aroha*, to travel some twenty-four miles to Owenga for an annual rugby football match.¹³¹ Paynter, the manager of the fishing factory, said the weather “was not so bad” when they left. He watched the launch pass out of sight around Munning Point three miles away. Shortly after, “a terrific squall came up”, followed by gales and heavy seas, but villagers believed the boat would have reached safely in the lee of the land before the storm struck.¹³² They were not reported missing until the following day, when the remainder of the team arrived overland at Owenga. Stormy conditions prevented any searching for several days, and no bodies were ever recovered.¹³³ Locals believed *Te Aroha* was “overwhelmed in heavy seas and tide rips not far from Munning Point”. This coast was notoriously dangerous in bad weather, a fact confirmed by an experienced mariner, who described conditions there “as far worse than those of Cook Strait”.¹³⁴

In the wake of this disaster the Chatham Islanders grew notably superstitious. Stories were told of a phantom launch which appeared in misty or stormy weather.¹³⁵ Travelling quickly, at times it passed so close to fishing boats its engine could be seen working. There was no sign of life on board. The first reports caused “awe and apprehension”, but when several who had seen the launch were accidentally drowned, sightings were feared as harbingers of death.¹³⁶ A young New Zealand fisherman working at that Chathams claimed he was not superstitious, but nevertheless, was glad to leave after hearing this “gruesome” tale.¹³⁷

Ships’ captains were often the bearers of bad news on their return to New Zealand. In 1900, Captain Romeril of *Toroa* reported nine fatalities during a birding expedition.¹³⁸ Every year, Māori and Moriori harvested young albatross at The Sisters, 20 miles off the north coast of Chatham Island. However, in August 1900, the expedition was postponed due to unsuitable weather. Against the advice of elders, a group of young men left in secret, only to encounter even worse weather as they returned. With less experienced boatmen, two of the three whale boats capsized while attempting to land, and all the occupants were drowned.¹³⁹

¹³¹ “Tragedy at Chathams”, *NZH*, 22 July 1931.

¹³² “All in Mourning”, *AS*, 4 September 1931.

¹³³ “Tragedy at Chathams”.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*; “All in Mourning”. The mariner was Captain Andrew Dowell of *Tees*, a regular on the Chathams run.

¹³⁵ “Chatham Islands”, *PR*, 16 May 1935.

¹³⁶ “Phantom Launch”, *PR*, 5 September 1934; “Chatham Islands”, *PR*, 16 May 1935.

¹³⁷ “Chatham Islands”, *PR*, 16 May 1935.

¹³⁸ “Boating Fatality”, *Pelorus Guardian and Miners’ Advocate*, 16 October 1900.

¹³⁹ Michael King, *Moriori: A People Rediscovered* (Auckland: Viking, 1989), 163.

Less than two years later, islanders were reeling after another boating tragedy. In January 1902, four men crossing Pitt Strait in a whaleboat disappeared without trace. The voyage was not considered foolhardy, as two on board were “good hands” in a boat, and one had crossed in a dinghy more than once. A squall came up just before the boat reached Chatham Island, and an observer on Pitt suspected it had not reached its destination. A storm came in, thwarting every attempt to send a boat to check on them. With no means of communicating with the outside world, one can only imagine the anxiety and sense of powerlessness experienced by the Pitt Islanders. Two weeks elapsed before *Toroa* called at the island, and the alarm was raised. Worried family members were taken aboard, and surrounding coastlines thoroughly searched. This search extended as far as the Forty Fours, some twenty-one miles east, where currents might potentially carry the boat. No trace was found of boat or occupants, but wreckage later washed ashore in several places.¹⁴⁰

Conclusion

By 1936, marine safety in the Chatham Islands was little improved, with only one lighted beacon at Port Waitangi.¹⁴¹ An accurate survey of the reefs, islands and surrounding seas was still a “pressing need”.¹⁴² The new wharf was useless under certain conditions, and passengers still faced danger moving from ship to shore. When *Port Waikato* arrived in June 1949, boats went ashore in very rough conditions. One was swept out to sea, and passengers spent a terrifying hour and a half adrift before being rescued.¹⁴³

Outside commentators tended to project an image of danger and fear, with sensationalized accounts of troubled voyages, wretched sickness, and “primitive” landings. Badly behaved ships on energetic seas were the butt of jokes on the mainland, in much the same way as the lack of roads on land. Ships’ performances often disappointed, seas appeared untameable, and rugged uncharted coastlines were verging on barbaric. In the eyes of some, it seems unscripted dramas, played out by the environment, prevented the Chathams from taking their place in a modern, more manageable world.

¹⁴⁰ “Sad Accident at the Chatham Islands”, *PBH*, 27 February 1902; “The Chatham Islands Fatality”, *SR*, 3 March 1902.

¹⁴¹ “The Chatham Islands: A Unique Place”, *ODT*, 28 March 1936.

¹⁴² “Chatham Islands”, *EP*, 15 February 1924.

¹⁴³ “Rough Weather at Chathams”, *PR*, 27 June 1949.

Regarded as inescapable, islanders generally bore travelling the sea roads with greater stoicism. Nevertheless, the sea always constituted a series of opposing elements; bridge or barrier, benefactor or thief, friend or foe. This is in marked contrast to the relationship evolving with the island itself. This too presented peculiar challenges, yet people tended to flow with the land rather than against it, working on and around it, and all-the-while developing bonds with place. The sea, however, was no one's ally, and even experts found it difficult to read. The word "island" itself denotes those differences; deriving from the Old English *igland*, meaning water, the concept of "island" itself suggests a vigorous and intense relationship between water and land. Islands are defined by water, and islanders are often captive to the seas.¹⁴⁴ Small wonder the people welcomed technological developments which improved communication, and helped overcome the reliance on shipping and sea roads.

¹⁴⁴ Gillis, 155.

Chapter 5: Communication, Place, and Identity

The creation of community and identity relies on connections between people and places, and the Chatham Islanders looked outwards, as well as inwards, for a sense of place. Communication was vital to this process. In its broadest context, this encompasses all those things that make people aware of others. It is the act of transferring information from one place to another, and arguably, the foundation of organised human life.¹ At its most basic and mundane level, communication is achieved through a shared system of symbols, signs and behaviour.² Speech is the commonest form of everyday communication; we express our thoughts and feelings, share opinions, and pass on information.³ Without communication, individuals remain isolated and unable to organise themselves into groups and societies, and powerless to enjoy mutual support through the normal events of life.⁴ The ability to communicate might be regarded as the essence of human life, as important as the very act of breathing.

In his history of telecommunications in New Zealand, A. C. Wilson recognised the difficulties of quantifying the social effects of poor communication in pioneer societies, or in determining why some communities felt more isolated than others. He was convinced, though, that improved communication made isolation more tolerable.⁵ This chapter investigates New Zealand's role in maintaining connections with this "outside isle", while conveying the Chatham Islanders' sense of isolation from without.⁶ It argues that the Chatham Islanders had an overwhelming desire for "new news", to learn of happenings in the outside world closer to real time, rather than months after the event. As new technologies provided more immediate and spontaneous connections with the outside world, there was a concurrent evolution of islander perceptions of their place within the modern world. I firstly focus on the relevance and limitations of mail delivery to and from the islands, before revealing the significant social benefits of wireless telegraphy from 1913. I then argue that private telephone networks not only reduced isolation within the island, but played a vital role in disseminating world news. Finally, I

¹ *Then and Now: The Post Office*, ed. New Zealand Post Office (Wellington: Govt. Printer, 1964), 1.

² Ibid. James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, Rev. ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 19.

³ *Then and Now: The Post Office*, 1.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ A. C. Wilson, *Wire and Wireless: A History of Telecommunications in New Zealand 1890-1987* (Palmerston North: Dunmore, 1994), 25.

⁶ "In Touch with Outside Isles", *DOM*, 21 February 1913.

argue, that as residents shared the privileges and joys of “listening in”, private radio receivers literally opened-up the world to the Chatham Islanders from the 1920s.

The post

As a cheap, uniform means of communication, the writing and receiving of letters played an increasingly vital role in daily life. Letter writing sustained social connections regardless of travel, relocation, and emigration.⁷ Postal services were especially important to an expanding British Empire. Networks across the globe allowed Victorians to transcend geographical boundaries as never before, and in effect, to reduce the size of their world.⁸ For early British migrants to New Zealand, corresponding with “home” was slow and frustrating, as mail took months in transit, and outgoing letters often crossed with incoming mail. Correspondents might wait months to learn the answer to a question.⁹ The arrival of mail was a significant event in the colony, offering a temporary panacea for homesickness and isolation. In 1850s Dunedin, a man paraded through the streets proclaiming the imminent delivery of the “English Mail”, and residents eagerly converged on the post office, sometimes waiting hours for the mail to arrive from Port Chalmers. In Auckland in the 1860s, the boom of a large gun heralded the sighting of a mail ship, and at other ports, a system of semaphore signals alerted townsfolk of incoming mail.¹⁰ Within the colony too, the carriage of mails was of vital concern, and the post office was regarded as an important colonial institution. Services were established on the British model, but under very different conditions of mobility.¹¹

In early years, whaling and trading ships in Chatham waters carried mails to New Zealand and foreign ports on an unofficial basis.¹² In 1855, Archibald Watson Shand became the islands’ first RM and Collector of Customs, and in 1855 he was given the additional role of postmaster.¹³ Shand collected postage fees for letters left in his hands,

⁷ Catherine J. Golden, “The Victorian Revolution in Letter Writing”, last modified July 22, 2010, <http://www.victorianweb.org/technology/letters/intro.html>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Jean Garner, Kate Foster, and Grace Neale, *Letters to Grace: Writing Home from Colonial New Zealand* (Christchurch, N.Z.: Canterbury University Press, 2011), 7.

¹⁰ James Watson, *Links: A History of Transport and New Zealand Society*, ed. Transport New Zealand. Ministry of and Branch New Zealand. Department of Internal Affairs. Historical, History of Transport and New Zealand Society (Wellington, N.Z.: Ministry of Transport, 1996), 71.

¹¹ Howard Robinson, *A History of the Post Office in New Zealand* (Wellington, N.Z.: Govt. Print., 1964), 3.

¹² R. M. Startup, *Chatham Islands Mails: A Factual Account of the Discovery, European Settlement, History and Development, Postal and Communication Services of the Chatham Islands* (Masterton, N.Z.: R. Startup, Postal History Society of New Zealand, 1975), 10. Foreign ports included Australia, Europe, and the United States.

¹³ Ibid., 10, 11.

and forwarded these by the first suitable ship. He had no office of any kind, and the Shand family lived at Te Whakuru, over 30 miles from Waitangi.¹⁴

Under the Post Office Act 1858, the post office in each provincial capital became a Chief Post Office. Although the Chatham Islands were not part of any New Zealand province, this title was given to a non-existent facility at Waitangi.¹⁵ In 1863, Captain William Esdaile Thomas replaced Shand. Thomas made his home at Waitangi, and since that time, the township has served as the island's administrative centre.¹⁶ Until 1904, the RM held the title of postmaster, but postal duties were designated to his clerk. From 1869, this role fell to Richard William Rayner, who arrived in 1866 as the islands' first police constable. For many years, Rayner was the first official encountered by new arrivals. Robert Lyne recalled their first meeting in the early 1880s. As soon as the ship dropped anchor at Waitangi,

we were boarded by the Port Officer, Mr. Raynor [sic]; the Collector of Customs, Mr. Raynor; the Post Master, Mr. Raynor; the Chief Accountant, Mr. Raynor; the Registrar of Births and Deaths, Mr. Raynor; the Chief Constable, Mr. Raynor; and the Chief Jailer, Mr. Raynor. In fact almost the only office which the ubiquitous Mr. Raynor could not fill was that of Medical Officer of Health, for which he was not professionally qualified.¹⁷

Raynor's many official positions prompted the nickname, "Deputy Everything Else".¹⁸ He was officially appointed postmaster in 1904, at seventy-six years of age, and died four years later.¹⁹

The first post office, built on the Waitangi foreshore in 1884, was a modest wooden structure that also served as a courthouse (figure 15). This was replaced by a more substantial building in 1916.²⁰ Bureaucracy demanded incoming mail and parcels were officially processed, so all mail was landed at Waitangi.²¹ Until 1933, when a wharf was built, the steamer continued on to various points around the coast, and generally

¹⁴ Ibid., 11.

¹⁵ Ibid., 12.

¹⁶ Ibid., 13.

¹⁷ Robert Nunez Lyne, *The Chathams in the 1880's* (Bath, England, Self-published, 1948), 9.

¹⁸ Startup, 24. Following Rayner's death in 1908, the resident policeman continued to act as postmaster until 1919, when the role was taken over by the superintendent of the radio station.

¹⁹ Ibid., 15.

²⁰ Ibid., 19.

²¹ David Holmes, "Chatham Islands Radio Station Z.L.C.", in *Chatham Island News and Views*, n.d., 07-042-10/12, King, Michael, Papers relating to the Chatham Islands, ATL. A sub-office operated on Pitt Island from 1899 to 1927, from the home of the appointed postmaster.



Figure 15: Waitangi c. 1895. Far left, the Mangoutu Hotel, at centre the post office and court House, and to the rear is the jail, usually referred to as "Te Kooti's jail". Carrie Foster, Betty Sylvia Wishart Album, n.d., Photos of Chatham Island relative to the Fougere, Beamish and Wishart families, Ref: PAColl-4855, Alexander Turnbull Library.

did not return to the township.²² Therefore, the receiving and sending of mail was a major component of boat day, and postal workers had a busy time while the steamer was in port (figure 16). Having come to town, this was also when islanders attended to other post office business, and staff must deal with money order and savings bank transactions.²³ This frenetic level of activity was a rare scene in the Chathams.

Ships seldom delivered mail around the island, and "mail carriers" were contracted for this task. In the 1880s, Lyne described this as a "Gilbertian arrangement ... of a piece with Chatham Island officialdom generally".²⁴ Rayner, who acted as postman on occasion, would appear at Wharekauri with a pack-horse laden with bags of mail. After "a few days at the station for recreation and refreshment", he returned to Waitangi to collect mail for the other stations, "repeating the process until her Majesty's

²² "Chatham Island News", SR, 22 July 1889.

²³ Startup, 28. Savings Bank facilities were available from 1893, and a money order service from 1927.

²⁴ Lyne, 9. "Gilbertian" is used to describe something ludicrously comical, in the style of dramatist and librettist, W. S. Gilbert.

mails had all been duly delivered”.²⁵ Small wonder residents chose to collect mail in person. Chudleigh and others mention several other “mail carriers”, and a report on Inland Mail Services in 1911 shows four separate routes, along with pay rates for deliveries 11 times a year.²⁶ New Zealand Post Office bureaucracy had its advantages. The appearance of mail carriers in outlying areas alerted farmers to the steamer’s arrival at the island, and signified an imminent call for wool or stock.²⁷ However, the greatest benefits were purely social. In their haste to receive mail, many islanders preferred to collect this in person at Waitangi, and this was a fine excuse for a communal gathering.²⁸



Figure 16: Dan McMahon, Postmaster and Radio Station Superintendent, surveying some of the 300 receptacles of mail which arrived by Southsea c. 1937. This was a record delivery. William B. Burt, private collection of Bryce Shirtcliffe.

The sending and receiving of mail was always important to the islanders, and the subject of dissatisfaction, criticism, and debate. Early mail services were spasmodic and disorganised. Residents felt seriously disadvantaged, and perceived this as government

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ AJHR F-03 Inland Mail-Services, 1911-1912. Untitled, 1 January 1911, <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/parliamentary/AJHR1911-I.2.3.4.3>

²⁷ E. R. Chudleigh, *Diary of E.R. Chudleigh, 1862-1921: Chatham Islands*, ed. Eva Carlisle Richards (Christchurch: Simpson and Williams, 1950), 421. Startup, 28.

²⁸ The social nature of boat day is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six.

neglect. In 1873, some more affluent settlers took steps to rectify the deficiency, securing pledges of £50 annually to subsidise an improved service. Chudleigh, who likely spearheaded the initiative, petitioned government on the islanders' behalf. This resulted in a regular three-monthly postal service, but despite this and future agreements, islanders faced an ongoing battle to secure sufficient mails deliveries.²⁹

The regular ship was often referred to as "our mail steamer", but logistically, the carriage of mail was always secondary to shipping company profits. From 1896, arrangements centred on shipping wool to market. During the wool season from January to April, a steamer might call up to three times a fortnight, and islanders relished regular communication with the mainland. Over those months, they felt like "an integral portion of the great British Empire". But this all changed when the "long trip season" resumed.³⁰ This was like being plunged into darkness; residents heard news of the world only once in every two or three months, and hankered desperately for information. As a local correspondent observed in 1901, this dreary time weighed heavily on all, and heightened the peoples' sense of "meanness and geographical smallness".³¹ Not surprisingly, the chief topic of conversation during these months was how to obtain more frequent communication with New Zealand. Opinion was always divided over whether Lyttelton should continue as the principal port of call, or whether the closer port of Wellington should be adopted. In 1895, over three-quarters of the people favoured the latter, believing shipping would become more frequent. Six residents closely connected with Canterbury were determined to retain Lyttelton, and remarkably, their influence carried the day.³²

Chudleigh was at the forefront of this dominant group. An avid letter writer, he was perhaps the island's most prolific correspondent, maintaining regular contact with family, friends, and business associates in England and New Zealand. He once posted 50 letters at one time.³³ Ostensibly acting on behalf of island settlers, he petitioned government on numerous island issues, and often enlisted the support of influential Canterbury friends to achieve his aims.³⁴ The arrival of mail always merited an entry in his diary, and sometimes the quantity is mentioned. On one occasion, 100 letters and

²⁹ "Chatham Islands", *Daily Southern Cross*, 10 April 1873; Chudleigh, 235.

³⁰ "Chatham Islands", *SR*, 22 March 1901.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² "Chatham Islands", *NZH*, 15 July 1895.

³³ Chudleigh, 390.

³⁴ In addition to mail services, Chudleigh petitioned government about settlers' access to land, improvements to shipping, and the provision of roads, schools, and churches.

214 newspapers; another time, “a large mail and many nice letters from home”.³⁵ In the evenings, he liked nothing better than to settle down “to a good burst of letters”, and deeply resented any interruptions.³⁶

Events of 1906 reveal the tenor of Chudleigh’s life, and highlight some of the frustrations of poor communication. When he returned from New Zealand in March, the government steamer *Tutanekai* was anchored at Waitangi. He was as surprised as anyone to learn Premier Richard Seddon was making a visit. News spread quickly in the vicinity, and a reception hastily organised. Seddon addressed the gathered crowd, spoke with prominent residents, and steamed homewards the following day. Before completing the final leg of his journey, Chudleigh had public business to attend to in Waitangi. Although he had only just arrived, he settled down in earnest to write letters before the mail steamer left the port, otherwise, his apparently important communications would be delayed for months. And as he later recorded in his diary, “all this time my own dear little wife is at home 25 miles away and does not know where I am or that King Dic [sic] has come and gone and the only place I want to be is at home”.³⁷

Time hangs heavy

The arrival of a mail boat was always eagerly anticipated, a point often reiterated by local newspaper correspondents. Islanders anxiously awaited news of distant friends and kin, and to hear of political and commercial developments in New Zealand and further afield.³⁸ In September 1906, a local correspondent spoke of this expectancy.

Once more mail time draws near. Two months is a long wait, without letters, papers, or any other connection with the rest of the world. When the steamer leaves the island, time hangs very heavy for two or three weeks, and one wonders whether we shall be able to put in the time; but as the days go by they mend their pace and the last few days soon pass. The news, when it does arrive, seems all at sixes and sevens. You do not know which paper to read first; you take the latest, of course, and there you get quite lost among references to things long past that you knew nothing about. It was nearly two months after that sad occurrence that we heard of Mr Seddon's death. It makes you wonder sometimes whether it is not better to be away from all the bustle and trouble, and to get your news when the excitement or grief has worn off somewhat.³⁹

³⁵ Chudleigh, 267, 349.

³⁶ Ibid., 216.

³⁷ Ibid., 432-33.

³⁸ “Chatham Islands”, *NZH*, 19 July 1893.

³⁹ “Chatham Islands”, *WA*, 13 October 1906.

Some would not have entertained the latter sentiments, and many islanders were deeply troubled by lengthy silences from the outside world. On Christmas Day 1887, Sophie Moore of Moreroa Station expressed frustration at her closed-off island existence. In a letter to her mother, she wrote, “I don’t think anyone can imagine the joy of getting letters (after hearing nothing for four months), till they’ve tried it”.⁴⁰ However, on this occasion, she was feeling especially blessed. “We have had a merrier Christmas than we expected”, she continued, “as the “Oamaru” appeared yesterday and we had quite left off expecting her. Francis saw the ship come in on Friday night, and on Saturday morning we got the mail and were all the morning reading the letters”.⁴¹ Saturday morning was Christmas Day, so this made the timing even more special. Joseph Sigley enjoyed his island refuge in the early 1900s, but like many others, considered prolonged periods of isolation a serious matter. His thoughts often turned to kindred across the sea, and sickness and death that might occur without his knowledge. No matter how urgent the news, there was no means of hearing it, and no chance of visiting the mainland, or paying respects until long after the event.⁴²

When Chudleigh arrived in the Chathams in 1866, he was accompanied by his friend and farming partner, Hoel Pattisson. In 1873, Hoel returned from England with his twenty-two-year-old bride. Katherine, the daughter of a Cheshire surgeon, kept a diary of her four and a half years at Wharekauri.⁴³ The Pattisson’s soon had four children, but because they struggled to hire and keep domestic help, Katherine had very little leisure time. She seldom moved far from home, so the arrival of mail was a major highlight. If Hoel sighted an incoming ship he would gallop home to tell her.⁴⁴ For Katherine, mail provided a brief respite from the burden of domestic duties. She spent every spare moment reading her letters; “no more sewing or tidying done that day” she wrote in August 1874, “87 letters, 1 book for Hope, 120 papers”.⁴⁵ The couple always shared their respective family news, and the writing and posting of letters was equally important. While the ship was at Waitangi, Katherine might dedicate three or four days to this activity.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Sophia Moore to Fanny, 25 December 1887, MS-Papers-10850, Moore Letters, ATL.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Joseph Robert Sigley, c. 1904, “Some Impressions of Chatham Island”, Ref. Z.Ms SIG, CCLA.

⁴³ The farming partnership was dissolved in 1877, due to Hoel Pattisson’s failing health.

⁴⁴ Katherine Jane Pattisson, October 4, 1873, Diary Transcript, Ref: MSDL-0806, ATL.

⁴⁵ Pattisson, 16 August 1874. Hope was her eldest daughter.

⁴⁶ Pattisson, 21-25 October 1873.

The Chatham Islanders developed their own cooperative system for delivering inter-island mail. Letters would be given to someone going in the general direction of the recipient's home, or people left these in collection racks in public places, such as the Waitangi hotels, or the Owenga freezer or store. Anyone travelling to "distant parts" would check these racks before setting off, and at Kaingaroa, the station homestead served as a collection and distribution point.⁴⁷ Regardless of weather, someone from Wharekauri Station rode twenty-five miles to the post office with letters before the ship sailed. Everyone on the island understood this sense of urgency, and sometimes a rider was sent from Waitangi to collect the mail, to ensure it got there on time.⁴⁸

On boat day, a crowd always gathered to watch the distribution of the mails. Excitement increased around Christmas time when larger volumes arrived; perhaps a 1000 or more letters, along with cards and Christmas presents, "all requiring an acknowledgment".⁴⁹ Newspapers were "eagerly seized by both young and old", and events of recent months "greedily devoured".⁵⁰ These would be savoured at leisure later, and every detail keenly scrutinised before the next batch arrived.⁵¹ Meanwhile, until the steamer left again, residents were frantically busy, in the "rush of writing to everybody", and ordering stores. After expending all this energy, "for some reasons we are not sorry to see the little "Kahu" steam away, and the 500 miles of ocean shut us up for another three months".⁵² For many other reasons, this seemingly interminable break in communication was the bane of an island existence.

Occasionally, a British Royal Navy ship would visit the islands, and some brought mails. These unscheduled deliveries gave residents plenty of time to reply to letters before the next regular steamer arrived.⁵³ In December 1894, a visit from HMS *Lizard* gave a rare opportunity to send greetings to friends and family in New Zealand in time for Christmas.⁵⁴ Government steamers called when searching for missing ships and castaways, and crews were amused to see islanders frantically writing letters to send with the ship, as though they "had a tremendous lot of news for the outer world".⁵⁵

⁴⁷ David Holmes, Chatham Islands News and Views, n.d., 07-042-10/12, King Papers re Chatham Islands, ATL.

⁴⁸ Pattisson, 24 February 1875.

⁴⁹ "The Chatham Islands", *NZH*, 14 January 1895; "Chatham Islands", *NZH*, 12 April 1927.

⁵⁰ "Chatham Island News", *SR*, 22 July 1889.

⁵¹ "Our Chatham Islands Letter", *PR*, 14 August 1908. "Chatham Islands", *NZH*, 11 February 1893.

⁵² "Chatham Islands", *NZH*, 19 July 1893.

⁵³ "Chatham Islands", *NZH*, 17 April 1893.

⁵⁴ "Chatham Islands", *NZH*, 13 January 1894.

⁵⁵ "The Fate of the Assaye", *PR* 6 April 1891.

Growing interest in the region's fisheries brought welcome visitors bearing mail.⁵⁶ In July 1907, the steam trawler *Nora Niven* appeared at Waitangi, "and best of all, she carried a mail ... everybody rushed to the post office, eager to learn what had been going on in New Zealand for the last two months."⁵⁷ The rise of the fishing industry coincided with the end of a regular mail steamer contract, and with no replacement service on the horizon, residents were thankful when a fishing company agreed to carry the mail, albeit "in fits and starts", just when a boat was "coming down".⁵⁸ Nevertheless, as one resident complained, "the Chatham Islander has to do without very many of the commonest conveniences and privileges of everyone in New Zealand. It will surely be rubbing it in too hard to let our mails become so irregular and uncertain as that ... the injustice of the thing is manifest".⁵⁹

Using freezer ships and trawlers was less than satisfactory at times.⁶⁰ In July 1925, the trawler *Awarua* left without collecting the mail from Waitangi, and a week later, landed incoming mails at Owenga. Carting overland to Waitangi posed some problems. The dray became badly bogged in the soft mud of Te Whanga Lagoon, and the deck was soon awash. The letter mail was safely carried ashore, but heavier items were abandoned overnight. Residents were relieved the weather stayed fine, and there was only minor damage.⁶¹ To the average New Zealander, these complications may have appeared trifling, but as I show in a later chapter, incidents such as this tended to take on greater magnitude in the Chathams.

The Chatham Islanders were not alone in their discontent. Prior to 1905, mails destined for New Zealand's more remote country areas were delivered only as far as a post office, country store, or private home, for collection by the recipient. The introduction of a rural mail service in 1905 allowed mail to be sent and received through a post box or bag at the farm gate. Newspapers and essential items were also delivered. Not everyone had a daily service, and in some areas, the service car came by just once or twice a week, in others, not nearly frequently enough.⁶² In 1920, James Horn, MP for Wakatipu, lobbied for an extension of postal services and telephone networks within his

⁵⁶ "Chatham Islands News", *PR*, 13 August 1909.

⁵⁷ "Chatham Islands", *WA*, 17 August 1907.

⁵⁸ "The Chatham Islands", *WA*, 12 April 1911.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ One advantage of fishing company vessels was that it dropped mail at Waitangi before uplifting fish from Owenga and Kaingaroa, and then returned to Waitangi to collect outgoing mail, passengers, and cargo before departing the islands.

⁶¹ "Chatham Island Notes", *PR*, 13 July 1925.

⁶² Bruce Duder, *The Bush Backblocks Legacy: Family and Community Life in Northern New Zealand 1850-1950* (Bruce Duder, 2015), 195.

electorate. "These services were essential", he argued, "if people were to be encouraged to live "away in the backblocks", as "without them, our Dominion will never get on".⁶³ The following year, the government extended and improved rural services, and subsidised mail deliveries to those "game enough to live in the backblocks".⁶⁴

In the Chatham Islands, household delivery was not considered an issue; getting mail to the islands in the first place was another matter entirely. Deliveries from the mainland to the Chathams were arguably the poorest in New Zealand, especially during the economic depression of the 1930s. With no guarantee of return cargo, shipping companies refused to service the islands, and in 1932, the government steamer *Matai* took the first mail and supplies for over four months.⁶⁵ The *Matai* made another special trip the following year, after a six-month lapse in service.⁶⁶ In the 1930s, New Zealand was an advanced nation in many respects, using many modern modes of transport to deliver mail. Yet, according to the *New Zealand Gazette* of 1938, the "back country" postman still roamed "the last frontier".⁶⁷ The "lowly" packhorse, hand-cart and sledge were still in use, and some areas received mail only once a fortnight. The Glade House to Milford route was surely the worst postman's job in the Dominion; the seventy-mile trek was made on foot as "opportunity offered". Only one bullock dray was still in use, the honour being held by the Chatham Islands. While "hardly conducive to speed", the route was short, running for just over one mile between the Waitangi wharf and the post office. The service only ran on a "as required" basis (figure 17).⁶⁸

As bulky items, newspapers would make up a large proportion of the dray's load. While often well out of date before reaching the Chathams, these were eagerly received regardless. The role of newspapers in disseminating news and knowledge cannot underestimated. According to communication theorist, James Carey, receiving a newspaper is intrinsically satisfying, as it represents and confirms a certain view of the world and one's place within it.⁶⁹ Its presentation of reality, whether pleasing or not, gives life an overall form, order, and tone, and invites participation because of an assumed social role within it. If the news gives structure to the reader's life and times, then perhaps it was especially important in the small and isolated world of the Chatham

⁶³ "The Wail of the Backblocker", *Evening Star*, 14 July 1920.

⁶⁴ "Rural Mail Service", *EP*, 2 August 1921.

⁶⁵ "Mail for the Chatham Islands", photo caption, *PR*, 31 August 1932.

⁶⁶ "Islands Trade", *EP*, 27 June 1933. The hardships suffered during this time will be covered in detail in a following chapter.

⁶⁷ "Mail Services", *AS*, 11 April 1938.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Carey, 16-17.

Islands. I suggest, that in the absence of many other trappings of modernity, to learn of the world as it was beyond island shores played a crucial role in creating some hint of belonging to the modern world.



Figure 17: David Holmes and bullock team carting mail along the muddy track from the wharf to the Waitangi Post Office, c. 1938. William B. Burt, private collection of Bryce Shirtcliffe.

Radio is introduced

Until 1913, communication between the Chatham Islands and New Zealand depended on transport, and ships bringing mail, newspapers, and people were the only means of exchanging news with the outside world. Many residents would be familiar with the wonders of the electric telegraph, which allowed messages to be sent along wires using Morse Code. Across the globe, information now moved further and faster than ever before, connecting people over great distances, and effectively annihilating time and space.⁷⁰ From the 1850s, the “telegram” was part of everyday life for many.⁷¹ Even as telegraphic networks began to cross national boundaries, experiments were underway

⁷⁰ D. J. Crowley and Paul Heyer, *Communication in History: Technology, Culture, Society*, 5th ed. ed. (Boston: Pearson Allyn & Bacon, 2007), 118.

⁷¹ Tom Standage, *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's on-Line Pioneers* (New York: Walker and Co., 1998), 63. The telegram was a message sent by telegraph and delivered in written or printed form.

to send messages via undersea cables.⁷² In 1858, the Atlantic Telegraph cable successfully connected Europe and North America, and celebrations in the US verged on hysteria.⁷³ Some predicted “the whole earth” would soon be “palpitating with human thoughts and emotions”.⁷⁴ In London, the *Times* ranked this achievement alongside the discovery of the New World, one promising a “vast enlargement ... to the sphere of human activity”.⁷⁵

Communication systems were an important focus for any colonial government, and of vital importance to New Zealanders.⁷⁶ The electric telegraph was first introduced in 1862, and by 1866, an undersea cable linked the North and South Islands.⁷⁷ In his study of nation-building in New Zealand, Ron Palenski described its social effects as “far-reaching and lifechanging”.⁷⁸ Attachment by wire helped dispel feelings of isolation, and fostered a rising sense of national identity. Palenski argues the telegraph was as revolutionary in the nineteenth as the internet in the late twentieth.⁷⁹ By 1876, a trans-Tasman link was completed, allowing New Zealand to stay in touch with the United Kingdom and other parts of the Empire. Messages that once took months to cross the world now arrived within minutes.⁸⁰

The Chatham Islands stood apart from these developments, and for this very reason, island residents were among the earliest proponents of wireless telegraphy for New Zealand. On 12 December 1901, Marconi transmitted the first radio signals across the Atlantic, and some in the Chathams immediately embraced the possibilities. Robert Stone Florance, RM from 1899 to 1904, began agitating for a connection with New Zealand at the earliest opportunity.⁸¹ He enlisted the support of some influential friends.⁸² At his instigation, George Laurenson, MP for Lyttelton, and Major William Steward, MHR, both visited the islands, and afterwards, actively lobbied government on the need for wireless communication.⁸³ In 1902, while Acting-Premier, Steward insisted

⁷² Ibid., 69.

⁷³ Ibid., 80-81.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 69.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 83-83.

⁷⁶ Ronald Allan Palenski, “The Making of New Zealanders: The Evolution of National Identity in the Nineteenth Century,” (PhD diss., University of Otago, 2010), 30, 31.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 32, 33.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 30.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 30, 31.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 35.

⁸¹ “Remembering Chatham Islands Radiotelegraph,” <http://maritimeradio.org/chatham-islands-radio-zlc/1970-1991/chatham-telegraph-service-set-1913/>.

⁸² “News in Brief”, *NZH*, 24 September 1913.

⁸³ “Communication with the Chathams”, *PBH*, 17 July 1902.

it was the government's duty to investigate the costs. All this was rather premature, as no system was yet devised which could overcome the distance.⁸⁴ Even then, Joseph Ward, the Postmaster General, doubted the expense could be justified.⁸⁵

As citizens of a modern and progressive nation, Peter Hoar believes New Zealanders were generally well-informed about new technologies, and learned about wireless telegraphy through articles in newspapers and popular magazines. Many were familiar with the concept long before experiencing it.⁸⁶ In 1906-07, the Marconi Company demonstrated wireless in use at the New Zealand International Exhibition in Christchurch, and the display attracted much interest.⁸⁷ Chatham Islanders also kept abreast of these developments, and spoke of potential benefits to island life.⁸⁸ When a local correspondent reflected on Seddon's surprise visit in 1906, he thought how different it might have been if a telegram could be sent in advance, as a worthier reception might have been organised.⁸⁹ The following year, the same despairing correspondent wrote, "I wish Marconi (or is it Sir Joseph Ward) would hurry up with his wireless telegraphy connecting us with the main land ... of all the places round the shores of New Zealand I think this would feel the benefit most".⁹⁰ Given access to wireless news, residents might have a newspaper of sorts, "even a weekly one would be very acceptable". With a population of only 400, however, subscribers would pay a high price for their "rag", but he believed most would be willing to pay dearly for such a privilege.⁹¹

The practical advantages of a wireless were blatantly obvious. In 1910, John McLean, owner of the fishing factory at Kaingaroa, urged the government to "do something" towards this; it was sorely needed, and he envisaged many advantages to industry and individuals alike.⁹² While ships and shipping stood to benefit most, farmers and private individuals also had much to gain. Knowing when to expect the steamer would spare farmers the expense and inconvenience of holding stock at

⁸⁴ "Chatham Islands", *ST*, 12 March 1912.

⁸⁵ "Wireless Telegraphy with the Chathams", *AG*, 26 January 1903.

⁸⁶ Peter Hoar, *Morse, Magic and Modernity: Receiving Radio in New Zealand 1900-1914*, ed. M. Mollgaard, Radio and Society: New Thinking for an Old Medium (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2012), 7.

⁸⁷ John W. Stokes, *The Golden Age of Radio in the Home*, Radio (Invercargill, N.Z.: Craig Printers and Publishers, 1986), 9.

⁸⁸ Numerous sources support this claim.

⁸⁹ "Chatham Islands", *WA*, 13 October 1906.

⁹⁰ "Chatham Islands", *WA*, 17 June 1907. Joseph Ward was Postmaster General at that time.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² "The Chathams Fishing Grounds", *DOM*, 26 November 1910.

Waitangi, and residents living some distance from the port would no longer need to spend an undetermined length of time in an accommodation house at Waitangi, waiting for the steamer's arrival.⁹³

Radio, or wireless telegraphy, was an extension of the electric telegraph. "Radio" is defined as the transmission and reception of electromagnetic waves of radio frequency; more simply put, messages carried by radio waves, rather than wire. Today we generally equate the term with radio broadcasting, a one-to-many transmission.⁹⁴ But in the early years of its use, point to point radio messaging was better known as wireless telegraphy. From the 1920s, private radio sets received voice and music transmissions; this device was also known as a wireless, but for purposes of clarity, I use the modern term "radio" here.

In September 1911, Prime Minister Joseph Ward announced plans to erect the Chatham Islands Radio Station at Waitangi. The primary purpose was to extend telegraphic links with ships travelling to the east of New Zealand, and to provide a watch for distress signals from ships. Steamers bound for London, for instance, would stay in communication range for at least another two days.⁹⁵ By linking with Honolulu, the station also provided an emergency alternative to the Pacific cable.⁹⁶ The islands would become a vital component in an instantaneous world-wide network formed by land stations and ships at sea.⁹⁷ As an aside, when the ocean was "bridged by 'aero' waves", Chatham Islanders would have daily contact with New Zealand, and learn of events in the outside world.⁹⁸ The decision was hailed with delight in the islands.⁹⁹

When Fraer visited in 1913, the radio station was being built on a hill slope about a mile south of Waitangi, and he contemplated the significant changes this would bring. He admitted, that once on the island, he had felt cut off from the world, especially as his length of stay was completely beyond his control. To have "absolutely no means of communication with your friends ... to receive no letter or newspaper, to be dunned with no bill, for four or five weeks", was certainly an "uncommon experience to the average man".¹⁰⁰ Wireless would dissolve much uncertainty, and messages "hot from

⁹³ "Chatham Islanders", *PR*, 22 May 1908; "At the Chathams", *Manawatu Times*, 24 July 1913.

⁹⁴ Hoar, 1.

⁹⁵ "In Touch with Outside Isles", *DOM*, 21 February 1913; Telecom, Chatham Island News and Views, 1 September 1988, 07-042-10/12 King Papers re Chatham Islands, ATL.

⁹⁶ "Stand by Across the Pacific", *PBH*, 4 September 1911.

⁹⁷ Stephen Kern, "Wireless World," in *Communication in History: Technology, Culture, Society*, ed. D. J. Crowley and Paul Heyer (Boston: Pearson Allyn & Bacon, 2007), 209.

⁹⁸ "In Touch with Outside Isles", *DOM*, 21 February 1913

⁹⁹ "Stand by Across the Pacific", *PBH*, 4 September 1911; "Chatham Islands", *SR*, 14 November 1911.

¹⁰⁰ "Life in the Chathams", *PR*, 25 March 1913.

the telegraphic factory” would alleviate anxiety through lack of information.¹⁰¹ On a visit in 1907, the Governor of New Zealand, Lord Plunkett, observed the islanders’ “easy, if not exciting existence”, but believed when wireless telegraphy reached them, “they would wake up more”.¹⁰² However, Fraer and others also believed that by gaining wireless, the island would lose one of its principal charms. In its present condition, its “splendid isolation” offered a rare respite from the stresses of the modern world, a taste of how things once were.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, “mere visitors” were quick to admit any romantic notions might soon dissipate, if a longer stay was called for.¹⁰⁴

On 27 June 1913, the first wireless message left the Chatham Islands Radio Station, and a reply received from Wellington. The local correspondent reported this as one of the most important events in the history of the Chatham Islands, but its significance escaped the wider press.¹⁰⁵ On 18 September 1913, the radiotelegraph office opened for business at the post office, allowing islanders to send and receive “Marconigrams”, or telegrams.¹⁰⁶

Within months, wireless proved its worth to shipping. When *Himitangi* was damaged on rocks at Taupeka, the greatest delay was the time it took to travel to the radiotelegraph office to alert authorities; from there, its predicament was immediately known.¹⁰⁷ No time was wasted in effecting a rescue, and newspapers compared this response with an incident two-years earlier, when thirty-four days elapsed before news of the disabled ship reached New Zealand.¹⁰⁸ *Himitangi* was in the news again in July 1918, this time totally wrecked on Monau Reef. Communication with the site was slow and difficult, with over 30 miles of boggy, roadless country separating it from Waitangi. Rough seas at the time also prevented movement by sea. Although few details were known, the most important news reached New Zealand via Waitangi; all passengers and crew were reported safe. Without wireless, relatives would be kept “in a state of suspense” for some weeks.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰¹ “A Lonely Outpost”, *EP*, 17 March 1917; “The Chatham Islands”, *NZH*, 23 March 1912.

¹⁰² “A Cruise to the Chathams”, *PBH*, 9 March 1912.

¹⁰³ Life in the Chathams, *PR*, 25 March 1913; “The Chatham Islands”, *NZH*, 23 March 1912.

¹⁰⁴ “The Chatham Islands”, *NZH*, 23 March 1912.

¹⁰⁵ “At the Chathams”, *Manawatu Times*, 24 July 1913.

¹⁰⁶ “Remembering Chatham Islands Radiotelegraph,” Maritime Radio, accessed November 4, 2018, <http://maritimeradio.org/chatham-islands-radio-zlc/1970-1991/chatham-telegraph-service-set-1913/>.

¹⁰⁷ “Himitangi Touches Rock”, *NZH*, 5 January 1914.

¹⁰⁸ “In Trouble Again”, *DOM*, 5 January 1914. By that time, three steamers had been dispatched to search of *Himitangi*.

¹⁰⁹ “No Details Available”, *EP*, 30 July 1918.

“One hundred words daily from the big world”¹¹⁰

While the public made little direct use of the Post Office Radio stations, these offered a varied and valuable service to all New Zealanders. Staff maintained a twenty-four-hour watch for distress signals from ships, and collected daily weather data. Forwarded to Wellington, this information was used to prepare forecasts, for the guidance of farmers, aviators, and the public in general. Up to three wireless operators were permanently stationed at the Chatham Islands. The first Officer-in-Charge was John L. Davies, assisted by James H. Hampton.¹¹¹ Shortly after the station opened, they formed the “Chatham Islands Press Club”, in response to local needs. This initiative provided residents with some of the social privileges of wireless telegraphy.¹¹² Initially, the press club purchased 200 words of wireless news every week; at five shillings per 100 words, this was relatively expensive, and subscribers paid up to one pound five shillings a year for a news-letter. Produced weekly, these were typed and duplicated by station staff and left at the hotel for collection.¹¹³ Early news-letters contained items of interest from the international and New Zealand press, sheep market reports, and a small portion of local news.¹¹⁴

Wireless telegraphy also brought the first telephones to Chatham Island. The telephone was introduced to New Zealand in 1881, but not widely used before 1890. Some remote areas waited many years to be connected to the Post and Telegraph network, and this prompted some rural dwellers to establish private lines.¹¹⁵ The New Zealand Post and Telegraph Department administered both post offices and radio stations, and at Waitangi, a line connected the station and radiotelegraph facility at the post office. From 1913, residents were allowed to connect their homes through a private telephone system, “in much the same way as settlers do in many backblock districts in the Dominion”.¹¹⁶ Initially, links were limited to the police, doctor, hotels, and fishing factory at Owenga, but by 1917, many houses and homesteads had a

¹¹⁰ “Hello, Pacific!”, *PR*, 4 June 1921.

¹¹¹ “The Chatham Islands”, *Ellesmere Guardian* (hereafter *EG*), 1 November 1913; “Personal”, *Temuka Leader*, 22 July 1913.

¹¹² “Chatham Island News”, *SR*, 5 December 1913.

¹¹³ David Holmes, Chatham Islands News and Views, n.d., in 07-042-10/12 King Papers re Chatham Islands, ATL.

¹¹⁴ Addington sheep market was in Christchurch.

¹¹⁵ Wilson, 68-69. Although telephone services were under state control, private companies or groups of households could obtain permission to establish a local line or network. Subscribers met the set-up costs and carried out repairs and maintenance. The New Zealand Post Office later took over and improved the systems.

¹¹⁶ “Growth of Wireless”, *NZH*, 20 June 1913.

telephone installed. When the first radio mast blew down, in true island fashion, the tubular steel was recycled for telephone poles in the Waitangi area (figure 18). More substantial poles carried the line the 15 miles to Owenga, where a public telephone was also installed at the freezer.¹¹⁷ According to Holmes, the private service worked well, and subscribers were quick to carry out repairs when needed.¹¹⁸

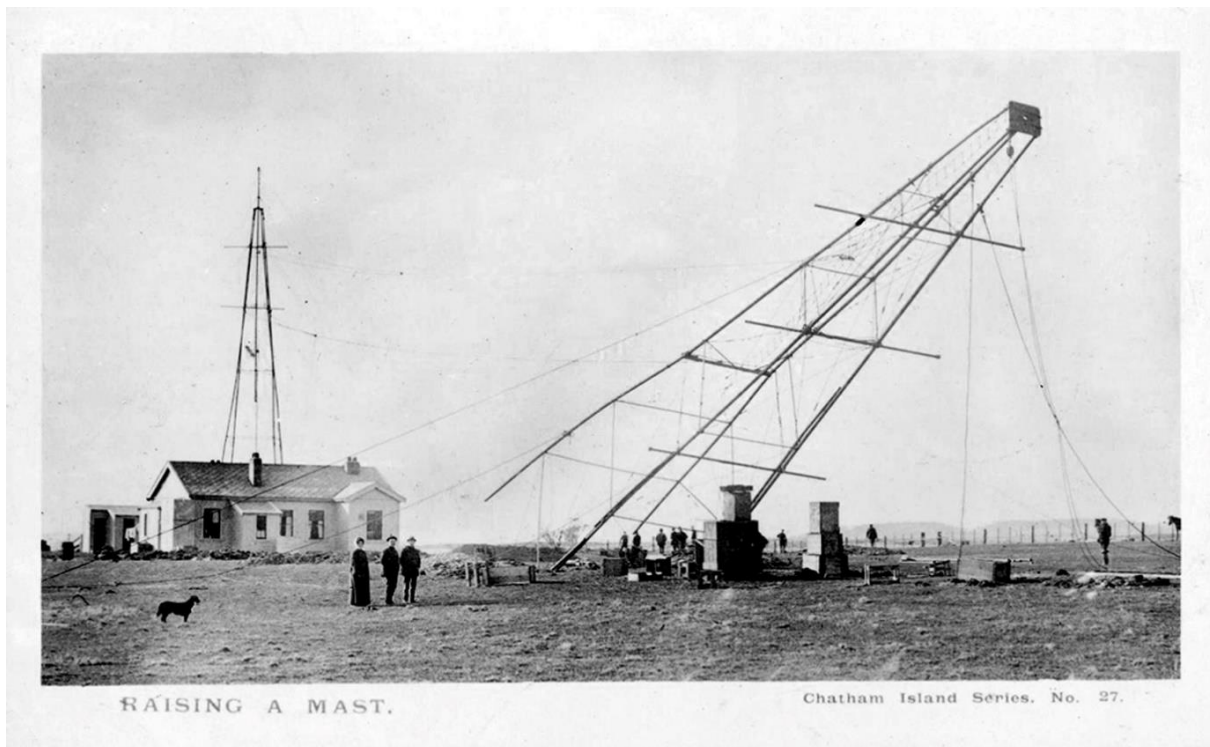


Figure 18: Raising a replacement mast at the Chatham Islands Radio station, c. 1919. Postcard, Chatham Island series, no. 27, printed by Lilywhite, Album of Maggie Chapman (Swan). Ref: Eph-B-POSTCARD-Vol-3-054-ctr. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

By 1917, Chatham Islanders were enjoying the benefits of wireless telegraphy, communicating with New Zealand and beyond.¹¹⁹ By this time, telegrams were no longer a luxury for many New Zealanders, and more of an “everyday convenience”.¹²⁰ This was not the case for most people in the Chathams. At sixpence a word, telegrams remained expensive to send; few were sent, but islanders appreciated the availability of

¹¹⁷ David Holmes, “Chatham Islands Radio Station. Z.L.C.”, in *Chatham Island News and Views*, n.d., 07-042-10/12, King, Michael, Papers relating to the Chatham Islands, ATL.

¹¹⁸ David Holmes, *My Seventy Years on the Chatham Islands: Reminiscences* (Christchurch N.Z.: Shoal Bay Press, 1993), 114.

¹¹⁹ “A Lonely Outpost”, *EP*, 17 March 1917.

¹²⁰ Wilson, 107.

the service.¹²¹ Incoming telegrams were left at the Traveller's Rest Hotel or the Post Office, and recipients' names listed on a blackboard outside. Every effort was made to ensure the message was delivered, but given the islanders' poor mobility, delays were inevitable. Ship's passengers who sent a telegram ahead often found it still awaiting delivery when they arrived. From 1927, a money order telegram could be included, and a local youth with access to a horse might be induced to play delivery boy.¹²²

Many Chatham Island men served in the armed forces during World War One, and everyone at home was intensely interested in wartime developments.¹²³ Throughout the war, the press club produced an extended news-sheet, much of it devoted to war news. This was supplied free-of-charge, albeit unwittingly at first. The Post and Telegraph Department sent 500 words of war news daily to New Zealand military personnel stationed in Samoa, and later, troop carriers bound for Egypt and England received these messages. Authorities discovered other Pacific radio stations "listening in", but this eavesdropping was allowed to continue. Without it, the people of Tonga, Rarotonga, Fiji, Tahiti, and the Chatham Islands might be months behind with the news.¹²⁴ In addition to the newsletter, this free news was reproduced in leaflets, and liberally distributed in the Chathams.¹²⁵

When Bishop Julius returned from a visit in 1917, he jubilantly reported the immense social advantages of wireless telegraphy. Brandishing a copy of the news-sheet, he lauded this as great step forward for the Chatham Islanders. The little weekly paper was "a source of great joy", especially during wartime.¹²⁶ The telephone was also playing a crucial role in disseminating the war news, as every evening, radio station staff read the news bulletin to those connected by telephone.¹²⁷ Julius believed, without these daily messages, "life would be almost intolerable" for the residents.¹²⁸ It seems unlikely each home received an individual call, and the islands probably adopted a similar system to those used in other remote parts of New Zealand. Telephone subscribers shared a party line, and each household was contacted with a distinctive Morse Code ring. During wartime, party line etiquette was modified, and when the newsreader delivered a long, single ring over the line, this was the signal for everyone to

¹²¹ Holmes, *ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ "The Chathams", *PR*, 30 January 1917.

¹²⁴ "Hello, Pacific!", *PR*, 4 June 1921.

¹²⁵ "A Lonely Outpost", *EP*, 17 March 1917.

¹²⁶ "Wanted, A "Boss", *ODT*, 11 June 1917.

¹²⁷ "The Chathams", *PR*, 30 January 1917.

¹²⁸ "Wanted, A "Boss".

pick up the receiver and listen in.¹²⁹ In effect, this was an early form of broadcasting, and for many, the only means of staying attuned to events at a critical time in world history.

The evening call or daily news-sheet gave islanders access to “new” news, for the first time in the islands’ history. As Plunket and others predicted, the wonders of wireless lessened the monotony of life, and kept residents alive to happenings beyond their shores.¹³⁰ The local telephone network proved its worth in many ways, for seeking medical help, organising social events, or just chatting with neighbours.¹³¹ Stephen Kern believes the telephone had an even broader social impact than wireless, because, in a sense, its immediacy “made it possible to be in two places at the same time”.¹³² Unlike written communication, it allowed callers to experience the emotions of others first-hand, and to respond immediately. This spontaneity over distance was unprecedented and marvellous in its time.

In the interwar years, the New Zealand wireless system expanded its role in the Pacific. From 1924, the New Zealand government joined with an Australasian company to establish an “ocean newspaper”, for the benefit of the traveling public on inter-colonial and trans-Pacific passenger ships.¹³³ The Chatham Island Press Club secured this service for a nominal fee.¹³⁴ By 1939, 500 words of daily wireless news were freely available, from the equator down to the Chathams, and at all times, the island’s radio staff continued to make news accessible. Daily news-sheets were displayed at the Post Office for all to read, and social life centred around the noticeboard.¹³⁵ The news-sheet eventually fell into disuse when private radio sets became more common.¹³⁶

Listening in

Following the advent of wireless telegraphy, for a number of years, nothing was heard on the airwaves but the dots and dashes of Morse Code.¹³⁷ As technology advanced, the possibility of transmitting speech via radio was realised. New Zealand’s first experimental radio broadcast was made on 17 November 1921, from the Physics

¹²⁹ Bill Richards, *Off the Sheep's Back* (Auckland: Benton-Guy, 1991), 33.

¹³⁰ “A Lonely Outpost”.

¹³¹ Holmes, 114. *My Seventy Years*.

¹³² Kern, 209.

¹³³ “An Ocean Newspaper”, *AS*, 6 May 1924.

¹³⁴ “Radio News Services”, *PR*, 10 August 1939.

¹³⁵ “Isles of Content”, *EG*, 21 June 1935.

¹³⁶ David Holmes, “General”, *Chatham Islands News and Views*, n.d., in 07-042-10/12 King Papers re Chatham Islands, ATL.

¹³⁷ Stokes, 11.

Department of the University of Otago. This was two years after the world's first radio station went on air in the Netherlands.¹³⁸ Interest in New Zealand evolved into radio societies and transmitting stations, and the pioneering efforts of radio devotees throughout the world led to an entirely new mode of entertainment, along with a large associated industry.¹³⁹ In its time, tuning in and entering the realm of listening "was an entirely new cognitive, emotional, and cultural experience", one that seemed both "magical and unearthly".¹⁴⁰ The first private radio receiver was brought to Chatham Island by Les Willis, superintendent of the radio station from 1923 to 1927.¹⁴¹ His three-valve unit attracted great interest, and island residents were eager to obtain the technology.¹⁴²

Early radio receivers were nothing like the trouble-free, "plug and play" devices we know today. Valve type receivers were relatively expensive to maintain, and it cost the equivalent of two weeks wages every year to replace the dry-cell batteries. Often, a six-volt car battery was also used, and this required frequent re-charging.¹⁴³ In New Zealand, radio owners took theirs to a local motor vehicle repair shop, but there were neither motor vehicles nor repair facilities on Chatham Island. The radio station undertook this task for a fee. Holmes recalled the difficulties some had getting the battery to the charger, but the expenses and challenges of operating the set were considered well-worth the effort.¹⁴⁴ The early devices were temperamental and prone to noisy interference; once set up, they must be coaxed into performing. Tuning in to a station was "maddeningly frustrating" at times, but nevertheless, a thrilling experience for the new radio owner. Finding that "eerie, supernatural mixture of natural static and manmade voices" was an exciting discovery.¹⁴⁵

The family blessed with radio was rewarded by the sounds and voices of distant places, an eclectic blend of talk, music, and static.¹⁴⁶ Susan Douglas studied early listener habits, and believes they were "lured by the prospect of witnessing entirely new

¹³⁸ Ibid., 11-12.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 12.

¹⁴⁰ Susan J. Douglas, *Early Radio*, ed. D. J. Crowley and Paul Heyer, 5th ed. ed., Communication in History: Technology, Culture, Society (Boston: Pearson Allyn & Bacon, 2007), 211; Hoar, 11.

¹⁴¹ "Life on Chatham Islands", *PR*, 30 October 1945.

¹⁴² Holmes, *ibid.*

¹⁴³ Stokes, 17. According to Stokes, listeners in more remote areas sometimes relied entirely on dry cell batteries, although some ingenuity and adaptation was required.

¹⁴⁴ Holmes, *ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Douglas, 211. A modern-day equivalent would be the early novelty of the internet and making discoveries through random browsing or using a search engine to find entertaining or educational sites.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 210-11.

auditory spectacles, the aural equivalents of lightning and fireworks".¹⁴⁷ Like an explorer, the operator roamed the airwaves, searching out as varied a content as possible, and seeing what distances they might reach. This was often preferable to trying to tune in to something special, as fading or static often disrupted a broadcast.¹⁴⁸

Early radio buffs expanded their knowledge and shared enthusiasm through radio columns in newspapers, and Chatham Islanders were no exception. Discussions generally centered on technical problems and the quality of reception from various stations. In 1926, an island radio owner reported on the performance of the three licensed radio sets on Chatham Island. All three-valve radios received excellent reception, and isolation was a bonus in this instance, as signals were generally less prone to interference from other sources at the Chathams. They received some Australian stations as strongly as New Zealand ones, and enjoyed a range of entertaining broadcasts from both. Admittedly, they had their fair share of static, and occasionally "jamming" from boats in the vicinity interrupted listening pleasure. It was particularly annoying when news sessions were "drowned out by Morse".¹⁴⁹

Comprehensive news commentaries were not a feature of early broadcasting, but in 1924, Dunedin's 4YA station had begun an innovative service. New Zealand's outlying islands received few mails, but some in these remote spots were now installing radio sets, so their isolation need not be so complete. During the concert programme on Wednesday evenings, 4YA announcers read articles of interest from local newspapers.¹⁵⁰ Chatham Island listeners appreciated the initiative, and the session compensated for the lack of newspapers during the long winter months.¹⁵¹ With the coming of radio, winter held one other highlight. Reception improved at this time, giving access to stations in the US and other distant countries.¹⁵² Unconstrained by national boundaries, in effect, radio waves brought the world to the Chatham Islands, and in the imagined space of early listeners, they too might be transported to far off places.

However, Douglas's account of early Canadian listeners appears to apply equally to those in New Zealand and the Chathams, in that, "they listened to get a more immediate sense of their nation as it was living, breathing, and talking right there and

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 211.

¹⁴⁸ "Isles of Content", *EG*, 21 June 1935.

¹⁴⁹ "Radio in the Chathams", *EP*, 30 September 1926.

¹⁵⁰ "The Wireless World", *ODT*, 16 August 1924.

¹⁵¹ "Contented People", *AS*, 2 April 1931.

¹⁵² "Chatham Islands", *EG*, 22 February 1929.

then”.¹⁵³ Edward Prendeville of Owenga enjoyed participating the “Page for Little People” in the *New Zealand Tablet*, which was published in Dunedin, and in 1925, the ten-year-old wrote of the “listening-in set” that was a feature of family life in the evenings. Most Chatham children had never experienced the sights and sounds of a city, and Dunedin was little more than a name on a map.¹⁵⁴ However, his father now tuned in to 4YA Dunedin, and Edward was excited to report, “we have heard the Dunedin Town Hall clock strike nine”.¹⁵⁵ By bringing the sounds of the city directly into the living room, radio allowed isolated island listeners to assume more meaningful associations with mainland New Zealand, and to gain a stronger sense of place within a wider community.

Bitten by the radio bug

By the early 1930s, radio had made its mark on New Zealand culture, and was providing “a great social service”.¹⁵⁶ By 1939, radio sets were a feature of approximately 84% of households. Most Chatham Island homes also possessed a set, and like countless others across the globe, for a few hours each evening, listeners entered another dimension.¹⁵⁷ Initially, broadcasters believed the service was most beneficial to a rural audience, but Patrick Day believes the commonality of radio helped bridge the gap between urban and rural dwellers, by allowing these disparate groups to share new experiences, interests and understandings.¹⁵⁸ With few first-hand accounts of listener responses in the Chathams, it is difficult to assess the extent to which radio bridged the social divide between New Zealand and the Chathams. It can be assumed, however, that radio broadcasts were more than a welcome novelty. Radio’s significance was evident to outside observers. Following a visit in 1928, Bishop Brodie donated a radio set to the hospital at Waitangi, and in gratefully accepting the gift, the Canterbury Hospital Board claimed they knew of no place where a radio could be more useful.¹⁵⁹ In 1929, a radio enthusiast and columnist holidayed in the islands, and he quickly realised the medium’s usefulness went beyond making evenings more enjoyable; “in an isolated place like the Chathams”, he wrote, “a radio set is a real friend”.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵³ Douglas, 211.

¹⁵⁴ “Women in Print”, *EP*, 27 November 1922.

¹⁵⁵ “A Page for Little People”, *New Zealand Tablet*, 12 August 1925. Edward’s father was the engineer and manager of the fishing factory at Owenga.

¹⁵⁶ “News of the Day”, *EP*, 17 July 1930. This comment was made by Minister of Health, A. J. Stallworthy.

¹⁵⁷ Patrick Day, *The Radio Years*, ed. Broadcasting History Trust (Auckland: Auckland University Press in association with the Broadcasting History Trust, 1994), 247. “Isles of Content”, *EG*, 21 June 1935.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ “A Useful Gift”, *PR*, 23 February 1928.

¹⁶⁰ “Chatham Islands”, *EG*, 22 February 1929.

This level of personal involvement is evident from regular radio columns appearing in newspapers of the time. In 1926, an island enthusiast used a curious form of expression when contributing to one such column. Hoar studied early listener responses, and believes many were “moved and excited by the re-embodiment of human presence at a distance”.¹⁶¹ When discussing his listening success and amusement, the Chatham Island correspondent often used the personal pronoun “he”, to refer to the station, announcer, or person responsible for the broadcast. His friendly, informal tone, and sense of humour also implied a personal affinity or acquaintance with the broadcasters.¹⁶² Clearly dedicated to the medium, he wrote,

4YA is much the best of the New Zealand stations—at present I am enjoying “The Gondoliers” from the loud-speaker at the far end of the room—but he fades badly at times ... at his best he easily outclasses IYA, who to-night is hardly decent on the head-phones. On Sunday last the Kaikorai Band from 4YA was a real treat. Dunedin's relaying is usually splendid, but I cannot say as much for that from Auckland. 2YM developed generator-hummitis, and it must have killed him. 4QG comes in very strong, as does 3LO, and their lectures are much appreciated, except when they get on to pig-farming, etc. The best reception I have had was a church service from 4QG a few weeks ago, and a sermon on “Prayer”. The speaker was an excellent one, and his voice could be heard reverberating round the church. Every word was received perfectly. The daddy of the lot is 2BL. He can always be relied upon and is generally requisitioned whenever one wants to show off the set to visitors. We ought to get 3YA well from here, and I am looking forward to hearing him to-morrow night, when he is expected to take the air. ¹⁶³

Whether or not this listener assumed a personal connection with others through their shared engagement in radio, his letter does give some indication of the animated conversation taking place on the island.¹⁶⁴ It is fair to say that radio improved sociability and leisure time. In 1931, an absentee Canterbury landowner spoke of the islanders’ obsession with radio, “they talked wireless all day long”, and as far as he could gather, thought about little else when there was no one to talk to.¹⁶⁵ Their preoccupation was understandable, however, as without wireless telegraphy and private radio, residents would be completely isolated between shipping calls.¹⁶⁶ Radio

¹⁶¹ Hoar, 11.

¹⁶² “Radio in the Chathams”, *EP*, 30 September 1926.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ The stations referred to were broadcasting from both New Zealand and Australia.

¹⁶⁵ “Contented People”, *AS*, 2 April 1931.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

was the islanders' chief extravagance, but as a local shopkeeper pointed out, with none of the "talking pictures" or other entertainments enjoyed on the mainland, there were few things to spend money on in the Chathams.¹⁶⁷



Figure 19: David Holmes, farmer, carter, and local historian, transporting emergency equipment to the radio station, c. 1945. William B. Burt, private collection of Bryce Shirtcliffe.

Conclusion

Speaking of telephone connections on Chatham Island, local historian David Holmes summed up their worth in his typically laconic style, with, "this was a marked improvement on the old system of saddling up and riding many miles merely to convey a message" (figure 19).¹⁶⁸ This sums up life in the Chathams prior to 1913.

Communications, both within and without, operated at a very basic level, and relative to these standards, any improvement would be regarded as monumental. Certainly, any advances were whole-heartedly welcomed by the Chatham Islanders, a response bearing out Wilson's assumption that better communication made isolated lives more bearable.

During the wool season, when mail deliveries were on a par with other rural regions of New Zealand, the Chatham Islanders felt like part of a wider world; any sense of vitality was short lived, however, and for much of the time they felt expatriated,

¹⁶⁷ "Isles of Content", *EG*, 21 June 1935.

¹⁶⁸ Holmes, 115.

rather than encapsulated in the nation of New Zealand. Due to cost and economy of words, telegraphy never met those early expectations of dispensing human thought and emotion across the globe. This was especially so in the Chathams, where wireless failed to displace mail, and letters remained the principal means of personal communication. Until air services were established from 1950, mail deliveries were never regular enough to make islanders feel like a privileged part of New Zealand's modern postal network.

The Chatham Islands Radio Station was set up to improve maritime safety and communications in the region, but the greatest benefit to islanders was the transfer of "new news", efficiently transcribed and delivered in both written and spoken form. Arguably, this news was most appreciated during wartime, but as I have shown, this was not received in the Chathams through any conscious act by the New Zealand government, but rather, by a harvest of the airwaves. Official access was permitted only as an afterthought. Private telephone connections adequately served inter-island needs, but spontaneous conversation with the outside world was not possible until a radio telephone link was established in 1953. This too was relatively expensive to use. And so, from the 1920s, it fell to another harvesting of the airwaves to lighten and brighten the islanders' daily lives. The cultural advantages of radio broadcasting were immeasurable. By listening in, islanders engaged with national and overseas events in "real time", and no doubt, this involvement stimulated thought and conversation on broader issues. The sounds of the modern world were welcomed in to the island home, and both young and old were liberally entertained and informed, through children's programmes, lectures, concerts, music, comedy shows, church services, and many other items of interest. While radio lacked the spontaneity of one to one communication, these early broadcasts were literally ingested, and the voice on the radio was received almost as a personal guest into the listener's home. Radio did illicit an islander's response, between neighbours, friends, and visitors, and through New Zealand newspaper columns. The sense of belonging to a worldwide radio community, in fact, any wider community, was an unprecedented experience for many Chatham Islanders. However, the degree to which radio bridged the social divide between New Zealand and the Chatham Islands remains difficult to assess. It likely succeeded in breaking down some parochial sentiments, but the extent of change is a question for the following chapters.

Chapter 6: Community: Food, Hospitality, and Sociability

For many decades, communication within Chatham Island relied on people meeting face to face. Community life took shape through certain key activities and traditions, such as “boat day”, hospitality, and the gathering and sharing of food. Anyone travelling about the island was a conspicuous object of interest, and when arriving at any home, friends and strangers alike took a place at the hearth, shared in the warmth of a fire and lively conversation, and partook of the best food on hand. The abundance of natural food resources in the Chathams is perhaps more widely known than other features. This positive image, disseminated to the wider world, garnered the island’s reputation as a living larder and sportsman’s paradise. This plethora of natural foods became a core attribute of this place, not only satisfying the need for sustenance, but also engendering a sense a pride, and a desire to show off these riches. Sidney Mintz views food and eating as the “basis for relating oneself to the rest of the world”.¹ I argue, that through food, and especially the act of hunting and collecting, insiders and outsiders shared some common ground. These male-dominated activities functioned as an extension of hospitality, which above all else, helped overcome islander inclinations toward defensiveness and determined isolationism.

Few would argue that food is the most basic of human needs, and the consumption of food was equally important to the Chatham Islanders. Robin Fox highlights the communal benefits of eating, by creating occasions for reciprocity and bonding. This easily takes its place as a “symbolic activity about sociality and our place in our society”.² Some Pākehā newcomers to the Chathams were unhappy to be deprived of familiar foods, and unwilling to partake of naturally occurring produce of land and sea. I argue that the universal, material need for food brought individuals and groups more closely together in the Chathams, but in this context, food-gathering and hunting took precedence over social consumption, and abundance was exemplified over taste sensations.

¹ Sidney W. Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture, and the Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 70.

² R. Fox, *The Challenge of Anthropology: Old Encounters and New Excursions* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1994), 39.

Creating community

By the early 1880s, the island had a Pākehā population of over 400, and visitors were surprised by the absence of church and school.³ The Reverend Anderson found many mothers tutoring children, but parents were anxious to share in the national system of education. Anderson put their case to the Minister of Education and Inspector General of Schools.⁴ When the first teacher arrived in 1884, numbers and needs were assessed. A school was proposed for Te One, as the largest number of children lived in that vicinity, and the drier, more village like atmosphere was believed “healthier” than the port of Waitangi.⁵ A flurry of fundraising galvanised residents in that area, because as one local correspondent icily noted in 1885, with little government support, “everything must be done by ourselves, if we want anything in the shape of church or school”.⁶ This highlights the paradox of island development. Paying no rates or taxes, islanders were not privileged with funds for infrastructure, yet many still expected financial backing from government. In defence of settler farmers, whose livelihoods depended almost entirely on wool, a fluctuating market and high shipping costs meant profits were often slim.

Classes were held in the same building as the Anglican church until a purpose-built school was erected in 1888. Over time, St Augustine’s was extended and upgraded, but as it was difficult to attract a resident vicar, the church relied heavily on lay preachers and occasional visiting clergy.⁷ One institution sadly lacking was a hospital, a problem I address later in this chapter. There were few suitable venues for social activities prior to 1880, but from the late 1890s, occasional gatherings were held in “a nice little building” at Waitangi. With an excellent floor for dancing, this was sometimes grandly referred to as the “Town Hall”.⁸ However, Te One continued to develop as the

³ “The Chatham Islands”, *NZT*, 24 June 1882. In earlier years, through the influence of Wesleyan missionaries and Bishop Selwyn, Māori had in fact established numerous small places of worship throughout the island.

⁴ “The Chatham Islands”, *NZT*, 24 June 1882.

⁵ Stuart J. Smythe, *I Have the Honour to Remain Sir, Your Obedient Servant: 100 Years of Schooling in the Chathams*, ed. Committee Chatham Islands Education Centennial, Centennial of Education 1885-1985 (Waitangi, Chatham Islands, N.Z.: Chatham Islands Education Centennial Committee, 1985), 8-9. It was believed 40 out of a potential 80 children would be able to attend school at Te One. Roving teachers continued to teach periodically in outlying settlements until 1908, when further schools were established at Matarakau, Te Kairakau-Te Roto, Te Awatea, Owenga, Kaingaroa and Pitt Island, although not all were operational at the same time. There has never been a school at Waitangi.

⁶ “The Chatham Islands”, *Star*, 21 January 1885.

⁷ Smythe, 9.

⁸ “Chatham Islands”, *LT*, 18 January 1895; A Second Visit to Chatham Islands, *PR*, 17 February 1892. This was possibly the building known as “Pomare Hall”, situated at the Māori pa across the river from the settlement proper.

cultural centre, and by 1894, plans were afoot to establish the Chatham Island's Institute Hall and Library.⁹ Using local funding and voluntary labour, the building was completed within a year. The hall was used for concerts, dances, balls, and the occasional public meeting, but educational lectures or invited speakers did not feature in activities.¹⁰ The free library eventually contained over 2000 volumes.¹¹ It seems it was difficult to maintain patronage and funding, as by 1925, the building was in disrepair, and the library no longer in "working order".¹² There is no evidence to suggest the institute revived.

Despite concerted efforts, no social hall materialised at Owenga. By 1918, sufficient funds had been raised, but the community suffered a blow when the building materials went down with *Himitangi*.¹³ Fundraising resumed from 1924, but never quite reached the target before the fishing industry fell into decline. A school was built in 1910, and according to Val Mete, this grew into a multi-purpose facility, a vital community asset. She remembered Friday nights during the 1940s; euchre and housie one week, and square dancing the other, to the music of the piano and piano accordion. These evenings culminated with a superb supper.¹⁴ To Mete, the school functioned as a marae, and the wide range of activities there were the epitome of whakawhanaungatanga and manākitanga (togetherness and caring). She believed the gatherings were especially beneficial to children, and sorely missed this communal atmosphere when she left the island.¹⁵

There were no clubs for children such as Girl Guides or Boy Scouts, and few other organised activities apart from occasional sports days.¹⁶ By 1935, tennis courts were in use at Owenga, Waitangi, and Kaingaroa, and rugby football was popular. As roads improved, it was possible for some schools to join for sporting competitions.¹⁷ There were few work opportunities for school leavers, apart from farming and fishing. A small number became pupil teachers, some taking sole charge of remoter schools in the

⁹ Major F. J. W. Gascoyne, *Soldiering in New Zealand* (London: T. J. S. Guilford and Company, Ltd., 1916), 155. <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-GasSold-t1-body-d12.html>.

¹⁰ "The Lonely Chathams", *EP*, 8 April 1904; "Chatham Islands", *Star*, 12 July 1895. The hall served as a schoolroom for a time.

¹¹ "The Chatham Islands", *WA*, 26 June 1906.

¹² "Chatham Island Notes", *PR*, 13 April 1925.

¹³ *Ibid.*, *PR*, 27 May 1924.

¹⁴ Val Mete, *Growing up a Chatham Islander: On the Edge of 44 Degrees South* (Nukaka N.Z.: Moonlight Pub., 2012), 108, 27.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁶ "Chatham Island Notes", *PR*, 12 November 1919; "The Coronation", *LT*, 18 August 1902; "Chatham Islands", *NZH*, 24 January 1877.

¹⁷ "Chatham Island News", *PR*, 12 November 1923; Mete, 68.

absence of qualified teachers.¹⁸ Others were employed in the fish factories, including young women.¹⁹ Few chose domestic service, and few island households could afford to hire staff.²⁰

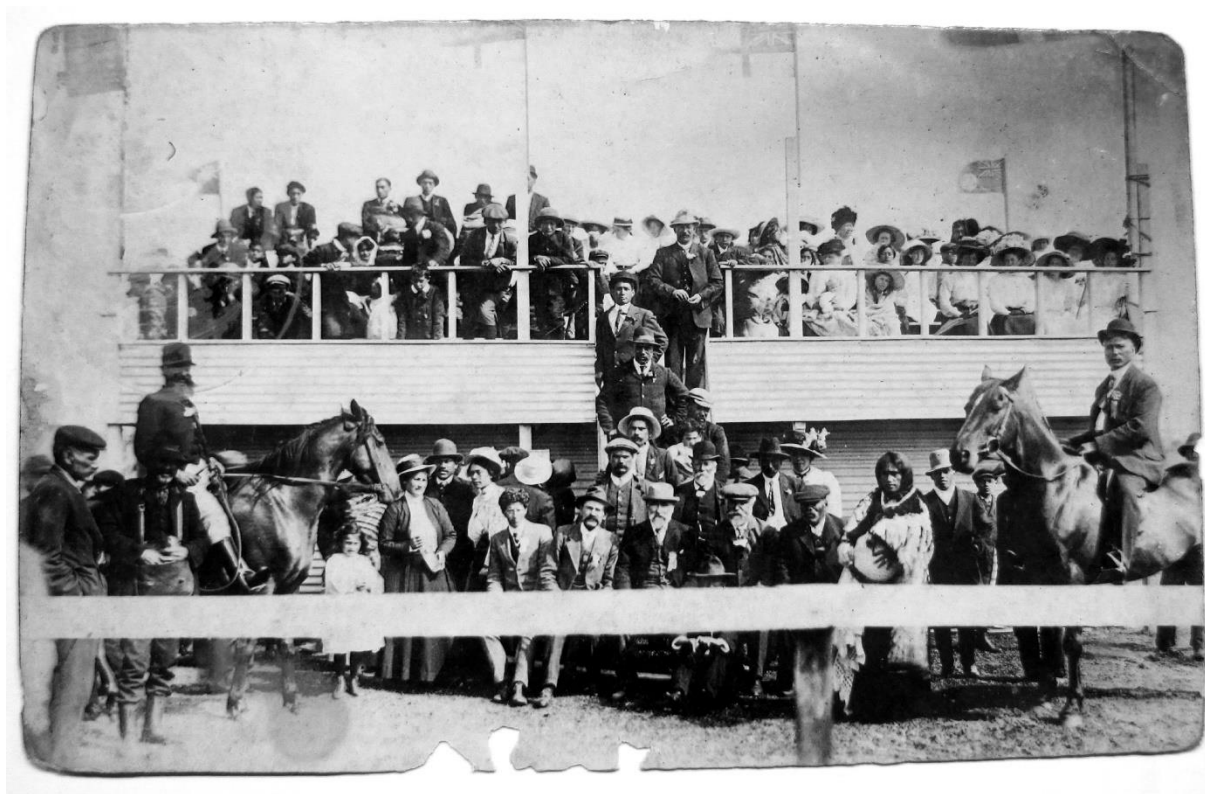


Figure 20: Chatham Island Jockey Club annual race meeting, n.d. Betty Sylvia Wishart Album, n.d., Photos of Chatham Island relative to the Fougere, Beamish and Wishart families, Ref: PAColl-4855, Alexander Turnbull Library.

Adults also enjoyed rugby and tennis, and on winter's evenings, time was passed at concerts, dances, and card parties. The annual race meeting, held around Christmastime, attracted families from all over the island (figure 20). Joe Wyeth, the Te One storekeeper, ran films in a local hall, more as a social service than money-making venture.²¹ Isolation was no barrier to social occasions in outlying areas. In the 1860s at Te Whakuru on the north-eastern point of the island, in what Chudleigh described as “an isolated point, sea on three sides and swamp inland”, the Shand family hosted social

¹⁸ Smythe, 116.

¹⁹ Muriel Phillips, “Nursing in the Chathams”, *St Laurence News*, 1956, enclosure in MS-Papers-0434-58/1, Scrapbook - Chatham Island Miscellany, William Beverland Burt Collection, ATL.

²⁰ W. N. Tucker, “The Chatham Islands,” *New Zealand Medical Journal* 59, no. February 1960 (1960): 81.

²¹ “Isles of Content”, *EG*, 21 June 1935.

evenings in their home.²² Space was confined, but Elizabeth insisted on playing the piano, so everyone could dance the polka, schottische, and waltz.²³

In many respects, small clusters of population on larger outlying properties functioned as islands within an island. Supplies arrived in bulk once a year, and by necessity, these parochial groupings were virtually self-sufficient. This brought its own form of isolation, especially for women. Rural women elsewhere might enjoy the occasional trip to town, to visit a range of shops, meet with friends, or attend a women's group. With no large centre on the island, and very basic general stores, this was an indulgence beyond the realm of most island women. Until 1932, there were no organized groups to unite and support, and even then, distance and poor mobility excluded many. In that year, the Mothers' Union (Association of Anglican Women) proudly announced its "tiny branch" on "the furthest outpost of the Empire".²⁴ In 1938, a Chatham Island branch was welcomed as a "notable addition" to the Women's Institute.²⁵

These groups were likely organized and run by Pākehā women, and there is nothing to suggest they flourished. According to Joan Metge, some Māori women joined Pākehā oriented groups, but were generally "more at ease with one another".²⁶ Prior to 1953, it appears Māori women lacked the confidence to organise support or cultural groups. Island-born Minnie Kamo, then living in Christchurch, suggested forming a branch of the Māori Women's Welfare League. The women were initially reticent, claiming, "we haven't got the knowledge to conduct such meetings".²⁷ Within a year, with support and encouragement, three branches and a district council were operating, which was "no mean achievement in such a small and isolated community".²⁸

²² E. R. Chudleigh, *Diary of E.R. Chudleigh, 1862-1921: Chatham Islands*, ed. Eva Carlisle Richards (Christchurch: Simpson and Williams, 1950), 141, 415. Elizabeth Shand was the wife of the first RM, Archibald Watson Shand. Although widowed in 1878, she stayed on there until her death in 1901.

²³ Lyndsay Head, draft copy of *The Island World of Thomas Ritchie*, Michael King Research Notes relating to Thomas William Ritchie, 97-042-07/12, ATL. The schottische was a partnered country dance popular during the Victorian era.

²⁴ "Women's Corner", *PR*, 11 August 1932.

²⁵ "Women in Council", *EP*, 26 July 1938. The New Zealand Women's Institute was established in 1921.

²⁶ J. Metge, *Rautahi: The Maoris of New Zealand* (London: Routledge, 2004), 180.

²⁷ Peggy Stanton, "Happy Birthday", *Te Ao Hou*, 1 July 1954. The league was established in New Zealand two years earlier.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Boat day

Church, school, and social organisations were gathering points within the community, but undoubtedly, “boat day”, the day a ship arrived at Waitangi, was the most important event on the island’s social calendar.²⁹ This is not surprising, given the importance of ships and shipping to the livelihoods of the people. As Robertson noted in 1882, initial greetings were always followed by discussion of the weather, and wind direction in particular. Conversation moved to the likely position of the ship, whether “she be at the island, or on her way up or down”, and islanders constantly anticipated these arrivals.³⁰ Interest stemmed not only from incoming mail, supplies, and people, at least equally, but also the prospect of gathering at Waitangi, and the social opportunities presented by boat day.

On boat day, isolation might be forgotten, and the problems and stresses of daily life suspended. Bonds of kinship and friendship were forged and sustained on the beach and foreshore, at the wharf, or in and around the post office and hotels.³¹ As boat time drew near, an air of anticipation enveloped the islands, and it was common practice to gaze seaward in the hope of sighting a ship.³² On occasion, a sailing ship would slip quietly into Petre Bay, but there was no missing the arrival of a steamer, as the whistle was sounded as it approached the Western Reef, some ten miles off the coast. This welcome sound had great motivational powers, and was like a signal to action.³³ People immediately converged on Waitangi, and from the ship, a steady stream of horsemen were seen cantering along beaches and over low rolling hills.³⁴ The township came alive with hundreds of people, horses, and noisy dogs, presenting “an animated scene of great interest to the visitor”.³⁵

This was a remarkable sight in the normally deserted township, and boat day was the only event that encouraged this level of activity, especially in winter. In 1893, one local correspondent claimed only the steamer whistle could rouse people from their

²⁹ This was certainly the case up to 1950, when flying boat days also attracted a large crowd.

³⁰ John A. Robertson, “Chatham Islands,” in *Proceedings and Transactions of the Queensland Branch of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, Queensland* (Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, Queensland, 1889), 89-90.

³¹ Robert Preston-Whyte, “The Beach as a Liminal Space,” in *A Companion to Tourism*, ed. Alan A. Lew, Colin Michael Hall, and Allan M. Williams (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 349.

³² “The Chatham Islands”, *EG*, 1 November 1913.

³³ “Maoriland's Dependencies”, *Otago Witness*, 17 December 1896.

³⁴ “Chatham Islands”, *ODT*, 11 April 1939; “The Chatham Islands”, *Star*, 19 January 1887. Many other newspaper accounts also describe this scene.

³⁵ “Chatham Islands”, *NZH*, 12 April 1927; “The Chatham Islands”, *EG*, 1 November 1913; “Life in the Chathams”, *PR*, 25 March 1913.

cursed lethargy.³⁶ In 1889, another commented on how a boat's arrival seemed "to destroy the equilibrium of every person's brains", the "hurry-scurry" that ensued from the moment the whistle was heard was "beyond description ... everybody seems to go stark staring mad".³⁷ If a ship arrived on Sunday morning, the church bell at Te One would ring in vain, as everyone had decamped to Waitangi.³⁸

When he arrived in 1891, Bishop Julius went unnoticed for a time amongst the bustle and clamour of the crowd, and watched with amusement as letters and newspapers were eagerly grabbed.³⁹ Newcomers were never forgotten for long, however, and all were warmly welcomed.⁴⁰ Friendly enquiries gauged the visitor's intentions, and ultimately their needs; horses were readily offered. The conviviality of this scene clearly made quite an impression, and few newcomers doubted the social importance of the occasion. Some likened it to a "gathering of the clans", or "a sort of family meeting".⁴¹ Others noted the holiday atmosphere, and indeed, some residents stayed at Waitangi as long the vessel was in port, relaxing, socialising, and writing letters to send with the ship.⁴² Those who stayed awhile soon realised this was the islanders' only true diversion, an important event that brought "gladness to the heart of all".⁴³

Incomers were also acutely aware of inquisitive eyes on arrival. In 1891, seventeen-year-old Caroline Gascoyne spent time with her Uncle and Aunt, Major Frederick Gascoyne, RM, and his wife Marion. Caroline had seldom been away from home, so going to the Chathams was a great adventure.⁴⁴ Passengers and luggage were bundled into a small boat and rowed ashore, where bales of wool and other cargo were piled on the beach. The waiting crowd stood about shouting, laughing, and gesticulating, and Caroline was surprised to find herself such an object of curiosity. People gathered around the boat as it came ashore, scrutinizing the occupants, their clothing and luggage. Surrounded by so many excited voices and giggles, Caroline felt as though she was taking part in some strange drama.⁴⁵

³⁶ "Chatham Islands," *Star*, 14 July 1893.

³⁷ "Chatham Island News", *Star*, 22 July 1889.

³⁸ "Six Weeks at the Chathams", *PR*, 29 March 1890; "A Second Visit to Chatham Islands", *PR*, 17 February 1892.

³⁹ "The Chathams", *Star*, 13 May 1891. The importance of mail and newspapers will be covered in a following chapter.

⁴⁰ "Life in the Chathams", *PR*, 25 March 1913.

⁴¹ "Life at the Chathams", *Star*, 15 June 1908; "Chatham Islands", *ODT*, 11 April 1939.

⁴² "Life at the Chathams", *ibid.*; "Six Weeks at the Chathams", *PR*, 29 March 1890.

⁴³ "Chatham Islands", *NZH*, 12 April 1927.

"Life at the Chathams".

⁴⁴ Miller, Constance, fl. 1992. History of the Gascoyne Family: MS-Papers-4549, ATL.

⁴⁵ Miller.

During her stay, Caroline observed the hive of activity following the ship's arrival. Once cargo was unloaded, the nearby store became the central attraction, and for days afterwards, it was "full of noisy shoppers both Māori and Pākehā, all examining what they thought were the latest fashions, trying on hats, and buying up materials for sewing, or foods with which to stock their shelves".⁴⁶ It seems fashion was important to the islanders, even if they seldom had reason to dress up. In 1871, hotel proprietor Isabella Briscoe returned after a stay in England. As an "old resident", she was well known to those gathered on the beach. Exhibiting the latest English fashions, she immediately captured the "wondering gaze of the benighted islanders", and "rather took the place by storm". However, it was later noted with approval that she soon settled back to life's routines, "to work in thorough earnest".⁴⁷

In 1913, James Hampton arrived to work at the Chatham Islands Radio Station. It was *Himitangi's* first call in two months, and "waiting inhabitants" surveyed the ship and passengers "with curious eyes", as though beholding entities from "the great Outside World, of which they had heard so much, and which many of them had never seen".⁴⁸ When journalist Frank Simpson "chugged" into Petre Bay in 1949, he observed those same "ant-like movements" on the shore, which eventually "assumed the substance of hurrying horsemen" bound for Waitangi.⁴⁹ By the time the ship docked, a large crowd was gathered at the wharf, and throughout the day, a steady stream of people moved about the beach, foreshore, and post office. As there were no rest-rooms, library, tea-rooms, or other public facilities in the township, the two hotels served as headquarters. There, old inhabitants met with new arrivals, and made plans to transport people to their ultimate destination.⁵⁰

Some contrasted heightened moods and emotions on boat day with the sense of quietude and desertion when the ship left. As Fraer observed in 1913, all things were astir while the steamer lay in the bay, "but when she lifts her anchors and screeches her whistle for departure, the echoes are hardly silent before Waitangi is again a desolate beach, to be called into animation only by the signal which heralds the return in a month

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ "Waitangi (Chatham Islands)", *NZH*, 18 November 1871. The widow of hotelkeeper, John Alexander, Isabella remarried in England and returned to the Chathams with her husband and step daughter, Amy Briscoe. The Briscoes ran the Mangoutu Hotel and store.

⁴⁸ "A Lonely Outpost", *EP*, 17 March 1917.

⁴⁹ Frank A. Simpson, *Chatham Exiles: Yesterday and Today at the Chatham Islands* (Wellington [N.Z.]: Reed, 1950), 18.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 143.

or six weeks of the boat from New Zealand”.⁵¹ A poem in the Te One School’s “Sandhills Magazine” in 1936, titled “Boat Day”, captures the atmosphere:

Here comes the ‘Tees’, rolling along,
With a full load of cargo, and sailors so strong;
Passengers too, with faces so pale,
Holds are piled up with grey bags of mail.

With engines achug, the wheel whirs around,
The boat swings up sideways, the screw stirs the ground;
Ropes whistle out and all is made fast,
The long ocean trip is over at last.

The gangway is lowered, a scramble is made
For suitcases battered, always mislaid!
Friends crowd around, while greetings are told,
Full slings of cargo come up from the hold.

Trucks rumble off, carts in the gutter,
People crowd postward with hearts all aflutter,
Papers and parcels are sorted at last;
Riders stream homeward, cantering past.

The scene is deserted, except at the pier,
With sheep bleating loudly, the cranes are in gear
With clatter, and bustle, and hurry all day;
Then comes the loud whistle! The ‘Tees’ is away.⁵²

Boat day was perhaps even more exciting to those living in outlying areas, as a ship usually only called once a year. Mete recalled this welcome change in routine for the people of Owenga. The children were let out of school, and the teacher seemed as excited as they were to observe proceedings, especially watching the bales of wool being rolled down the hill.⁵³

While these accounts project a sense of continuity, some aspects of shipping did change over time. Firstly, steamers did help reduce that “glorious state of uncertainty”, so common in the era of sail, and once a radio station was established, people learned of a ship’s departure from New Zealand. This left much less conjecture over a ship’s arrival

⁵¹ “Life in the Chathams”, *PR*, 25 March 1913.

⁵² Fiona Holmes, *Chatham Islands Rekohu, 1791-1984* (Waitangi, Chatham Islands: Self-published, 1984), 46.

⁵³ Mete, 23.

time, and presumably less to talk about.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, with sparse and irregular shipping, boat day always remained a significant event in the Chathams.

The open door

In outlying settlements and remote farm houses, varied and interesting conversation was often in short supply. Perhaps this explains why Chatham Islanders made hospitality a key feature of everyday life. Virtually every visitor account mentions the warm welcomes received when traveling about the island, a memorable characteristic that newcomers found charming. Sigley claimed there was no real need for accommodation houses there, as “every settler’s homestead is one, gratis”.⁵⁵ Hampton found kindness wherever he went, and people always seemed pleased “to see anyone who might call on them”.⁵⁶ No doubt, offering hospitality to all-comers helped alleviate a sense of isolation, but the inherent social benefits of this custom seemed to escape many visitors. For the local population, hospitality had deeper significance. The open-door policy, the welcoming of friends and strangers, was crucial to building relationships, a vital social and cultural practice.

Hospitality might be regarded as a foundational custom of island life.⁵⁷ As people rode up to 40 miles between settlements, travellers were especially grateful for a warm reception. Unexpected arrivals brought news, mails, and messages, along with company and conversation, and all were welcome guests.⁵⁸ In 1866, Frederick Hunt, a resident of 26 years, spoke of:

men truly hospitable in their humble way; in their abodes, friends and strangers share alike; the step on the threshold is a signal for the pot to be put on the fire; in fact, either my house or theirs is welcome to all comers, and the best that can be produced is placed before them. During my wanderings, these hospitable houses of call have always been hailed with deep thankfulness.⁵⁹

Due to the scattered nature of settlement, anyone riding about the island was a conspicuous object of interest, a welcome respite from the monotony of daily life. In

⁵⁴ “The Chatham Islands”, *EG*, 1 November 1913.

⁵⁵ Joseph Robert Sigley, c. 1904, “Some Impressions of Chatham Island”, Ref. Z.Ms SIG, CCLA.

⁵⁶ “The Chatham Islands”, *EG*, 1 November 1913.

⁵⁷ Frederick Hunt, *Twenty-Five Years’ Experience in New Zealand and the Chatham Islands: An Autobiography*, 2nd ed. (Wellington: William Lyon, 1866), 60.

⁵⁸ “The Chatham Islands”, *EG*, 1 November 1913.

⁵⁹ Hunt, 60.

1908, Henry Skey of the Christchurch Magnetic Observatory, found people took a great deal of interest in his survey project, and assisted in any way possible.⁶⁰ Between 1947 and 1956, anthropologist Christina Jefferson carried out the first field survey of dendroglyphs (rākau momori or Moriori memory trees) on Chatham Island.⁶¹ As an older single woman working alone, she was considered unusual at least.⁶² Riding over a 1000 miles in total, Jefferson set up camp in some isolated places. The closest residents made a point of calling, to offer food and lodging. She was grateful for many kindnesses, such as,

cups of tea along the way, company for a brief mile or two on a lonely journey, a cheery word as we stopped to exchange news in passing, the giving of the time of day from their saddles as they drew rein for a moment beside my unfrequented hut, and an enquiry as to my need of essential things; matches, a piece of a new loaf, a chop or two, eggs, shellfish or a fat bird as they returned from hunting. They gave too, a direction here, and a warning there as I branched off on new and untried paths. These were some of the pleasures for which I am indebted to those warm-hearted folks.⁶³

Val Mete encountered Jefferson while a pupil at Owenga School, and admitted the children were suspicious at first. Some thought Jefferson was a little eccentric, but in time they came to enjoy her visits. In hindsight, Mete attributed the children's wariness to their relative isolation. Contained in the "comfort zone" of the village, they seldom saw strangers. This was a close-knit community, and Mete fondly remembered the "natural practice" of hospitality, the casual interactions central to life there in the 1940s. People always made time for one another, "no one stopped to talk without going inside for a 'cuppa'".⁶⁴ At times, some might chafe at life's limitations, or feel "hard done by", but there was comfort in knowing that others were "in the same boat". People seldom complained about what they did not have, and when there was something to celebrate, everyone came together to have fun. Mete believes the same applied in other settlements throughout the island.⁶⁵ As an outside observer, Ruth Canter admired the

⁶⁰ "A Scientist's Visit", *Star*, 23 May 1908.

⁶¹ These are carvings (or bruising) made into living kōpi trees (Māori karaka or *Corynocarpus laevigatus*).

⁶² Mete, 143. Jefferson was sixty-five years of age when the work was completed.

⁶³ Ibid. Christina Jefferson, "The Dendroglyphs of the Chatham Islands," *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 64, no. 4 (1955): 369.

⁶⁴ Mete, 127.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 108.

islander's readiness to celebrate the small triumphs of daily life. She once saw a "sideboard of enormous proportions", perched high on kerosene cases, and tied on board a konāke. Carted 13 miles over rough ground, and through a lake up to three feet deep, it miraculously arrived in excellent condition; "the party given to celebrate its safe passage was certainly what Gracie Fields would call 'a do'".⁶⁶

Food and sociability

Hospitality, sociability, and food tend to go hand in hand. Rich in natural resources, the Chathams developed quite a reputation as a living larder. Most visitor accounts mention this abundance, and the ease with which it was caught and gathered.⁶⁷ However, colonisers everywhere must adapt, at least in part, to a different set of living conditions, including diet. For indigenous Moriori, the colder, harsher climate of the islands was markedly different to tropical Polynesia, with its long tradition of horticulture, and abundant fruits and vegetables.⁶⁸ Legend tells of failed efforts to cultivate kūmara (*Ipomoea batatas*), taro (*Colocasia esculenta*), and yam, and limited success in establishing a certain type of fern root, foods which could be stored for winter use.⁶⁹ Yet a substantial population existed successfully within a limited area, and the story of Moriori as hunter-gatherers in Rēkohu is one of successful adaptation and managed subsistence in a small, cold water island environment.⁷⁰

Chatham Island provided sufficient fresh food all year round. Picking and curing kopi berries was a communal activity, and the nutty kernels were shared. Kopi, and the roots of bracken fern grown on good soils, were the only plants suited to extensive exploitation. These were important sources of carbohydrate. Inland waters teemed with fish, eels, and water fowl, and birds and bird's eggs were highly valued. A wide range of sea birds were eaten, including toroa (young albatross).⁷¹ Moriori harvested

⁶⁶ Ruth Canter, "A Brake on Development in Chatham Islands", *Auckland Weekly News*, 12 June 1946.

⁶⁷ "The Chatham Islands", *WA*, 26 June 1906.

⁶⁸ C. E. M. Pearce and F. M. Pearce, *Oceanic Migration: Paths, Sequence, Timing and Range of Prehistoric Migration in the Pacific and Indian Oceans* (Springer Netherlands, 2010), 350. Polynesian peoples attempted to occupy a range of islands in South Polynesia, from sub-tropical to sub-polar environments, but only the Chatham Islands were still inhabited at the time of European discovery.

⁶⁹ Alexander W. Shand, "The Early History of the Morioris," in *Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New Zealand 1868-1961* (1904), 147.

⁷⁰ Douglas G. Sutton, "The Whence of the Moriori," *Journal of New Zealand History* 19, no. 1 (1985): 7; Pearce and Pearce, 349. Population estimates for pre-contact Moriori vary widely, from Moriori estimates of 3,200, to European calculations of 2000.

⁷¹ Rhys Richards, "A Tentative Population Distribution Map of the Morioris of Chatham Island, Circa 1790," *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 81, no. 3 (1972): 355. There were no naturally occurring land mammals on the islands.

these on rocky outliers such as the Sisters and Forty Fours, up to 28 miles from Chatham Island. These were reached by controlled drift voyages in korari, or wash-through rafts.⁷² Up to 15 metres in length, floors and sides were constructed of bound reeds, and in the base, inflated kelp improved flotation and buoyancy. Sitting low in the water, and partially waterlogged, korari remained stable in high-swell conditions. They were ideal for coming alongside sheer rock faces, and young men derived mana by scaling precipitous cliffs to reach their prey.⁷³ There was mana too in diving for crayfish in rough seas, but most inshore fish species were relatively easy to catch. During calmer months nets were set and cast off rocky promontories.⁷⁴ Shellfish were also a staple, and pāua, pipi (*Paphies australis*), and kāeo (sea tulips or *Boltenia pachydermatina*) were likely collected by women and children.⁷⁵ A limited number of seals (*Arctocephalus forsteri*) were killed throughout the year, and Moriori depended on these for protein and clothing.⁷⁶

The controlled, subsistence lifestyle of Moriori ended with an influx of sealers in the early 1800s.⁷⁷ Most were escaped convicts from Australia. It was not unusual for sealers to be marooned on rocks and small islands, devoid of vegetation and fresh water, for an indefinite period, but ideally, a ship called every three months, to collect skins, and replenish supplies.⁷⁸ No records exist to describe specific conditions at the Chathams, or to learn what natural resources they might have used. However, according to William Baucke, this “human jetsam” could hardly complain about the quality of employer provisions.⁷⁹ He described “chopping-block hard, rock salted beef, joiners’ glue rigid ship’s crackers, customs condemned unripe mouldy coffee-beans, black stringy molasses”, foods he believed reflected the lowly social status of these workers.⁸⁰

⁷² Douglas G. Sutton, “A Culture History of the Chatham Islands,” *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 89, no. 1 (1980): 82.

⁷³ Michael King, *Mori: A People Rediscovered* (Auckland: Viking, 1989), 28, 31.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 24, 28.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷⁶ Richards, 354. Seal skins were vitally important, as fibre from flax (Chatham Island harakeke or *Phormium aff. tenax*) was shorter than its New Zealand counterpart, and the leaf more difficult to work into garments.

⁷⁷ According to Rhys Richards, British sealers had opportunity to visit the Chathams as early as 1805. See “Whaling and Sealing at the Chatham Islands”, Roebuck Press, 1982.

⁷⁸ “Old Sealing Days”, *NZH*, 14 October 1933.

⁷⁹ “Where the White Man Treads”, *NZH*, 23 February 1907. William Baucke was born on Chatham Island in 1846, the son of Moravian missionaries Johannes and Maria Baucke, née Müller. Given his birth year, it is unlikely William wrote from first-hand experience, and he was known to embellish his historical writing.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

It was the abundance of food that drew Māori attention to Wharekauri.⁸¹ In 1835, Māori sealers and whalers told Ngati Tama elders of an island not far eastward, a “land of food—*he whenua kai!*”⁸² At that time Ngati Tama and Ngati Mutunga were unhappily ensconced at Poneke (Wellington) and on the Kapiti Coast, having been forced from tribal lands in Taranaki by musket warfare. Living in overcrowded conditions, and fearing further hostilities, leaders chose to colonise Chatham Island. After hijacking a trading vessel at Port Nicholson, in late October, the first group of 500 men, women, and children sailed to the Chathams. *Lord Rodney* also carried 70 tons of seed potatoes. This migration highlights Māori reliance on potatoes, and supports the view of social historian Tony Simpson, who claims the potato revolutionized Māori society.⁸³ After most of the passengers were landed on the island, a sudden storm forced the ship to clear away off the coast. With the potatoes still on board, some on shore cried all night at the prospect of being marooned there without them.⁸⁴ There were great scenes of relief when the ship returned the following day. Potatoes thrived in fertile soils on coastal fringes, and given the wealth of additional food sources on the island, by 1866, Chatham Island Māori were described as “singularly favoured”, as “no people in the world have the comforts of life more immediately within their grasp”.⁸⁵

In a place devoid of modern infrastructure and development, plenitude became the island’s key defining feature. Most visitor accounts mention this abundance, and the ease with which it was caught and gathered.⁸⁶ When the Reverend Anderson toured in 1882, he noted expansive lakes and lagoons swarming with water fowl. The bush held plenty of pigeons, and sea fishing was superior to that in New Zealand. Shell-fish were easily gathered, and sea-birds made “a capital dish”. “Taking all things into account”, he wrote, “I do not suppose any man has ever yet wanted food on the island”.⁸⁷

This was not entirely the case, however, and while people were unlikely to starve, some took little comfort in that fact. Pākehā settlers often clung to a preferred diet

⁸¹ Alexander Shand, “The Occupation of the Chatham Islands by the Maoris in 1835. Part I - the Migration of Ngatiawa to Port Nicholson,” *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 1, no. 2 (1892): 154.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 156. Tony Simpson, *A Distant Feast: The Origins of New Zealand's Cuisine* (Auckland: Godwit, 1999), 84. It is likely there were multiple introductions of potatoes to Aotearoa, possibly as early as 1769. These were readily adopted by Māori, and potatoes took the place of fern roots as a source of carbohydrate.

⁸⁴ “New Zealand”, *The Sydney Herald*, 29 January 1836.

⁸⁵ “The Chatham Islands”, *Daily Southern Cross*, 23 July 1866.

⁸⁶ “The Chatham Islands”, *WA*, 26 June 1906.

⁸⁷ Philip Cuthbert Anderson, *The Chatham Islands: With Notes of a Visit There in the Months July, August, and September, 1882* (Christchurch, N.Z.: A. Turner, 1882), 9-10.

wherever possible, and hankered after familiar tastes. According to Simpson, this is typical of transplanted cultures, who, through “cultural arrogance”, virtually ignored valuable food substitutes within easier reach.⁸⁸ When recalling the basic range of foodstuffs available in the 1880s, Lyne was more concerned by the lack of familiar foods, such as bacon, ham, eggs, jam, canned food, or confectionery. Instead, mutton and potatoes were standard fare, along with home-grown vegetables. Admittedly, the potatoes called cowinwini [sic] were excellent, the best he had ever tasted.⁸⁹ Sometimes a bullock was slaughtered, and the meat salted down in a tub of brine. This was a welcome change, and quickly consumed. The adjacent coastline abounded with fish, but Lyne claimed the fear of sharks deterred the would-be fisherman.⁹⁰ Also, at this time, fish was not a valued part of the Pākehā diet, as in Britain this was regarded as the food of the poor, a taint many wished to leave behind.⁹¹ And as for game, the serious business of farming on Chudleigh’s Wharekauri Station meant Lyne and the other workers had “no time for shooting wild duck in the island lakes”.⁹²

It was often difficult to maintain exclusionary preferences, because imported foods were so often unobtainable. Bread was a staple, therefore, the absence of flour was most keenly felt.⁹³ Moravian missionaries established small crops of wheat, no easy task given the limited sunshine and moisture-laden atmosphere.⁹⁴ Flour was produced in small hand-mills, a slow and tedious process.⁹⁵ Maria Baucke joined the mission in 1845, and her anxiety over food reinforces the extent to which food and eating constitute one’s culturally specific humanity.⁹⁶ Before leaving for the Chathams, Maria held a responsible position as a maternity nurse in a large Berlin hospital. It was a shock to find that even the “essentials” were unobtainable on the island, and there were certainly no luxuries.⁹⁷ Maria missed the comfort of familiar foods, some semblance of her previous lifestyle to ease her adjustment.

⁸⁸ Simpson, 40, 91.

⁸⁹ Kōwiniwini (*Solanum tuberosum*) were a potato cultivar popular with Māori. Purplish-red in colour, these have a rich nutty flavour.

⁹⁰ Robert Nunez Lyne, *The Chathams in the 1880's* (Bath, England: Self-published, 1948), 36.

⁹¹ Simpson, 52.

⁹² Lyne, 10.

⁹³ Mintz, 96.

⁹⁴ “Chatham Islands Notes”, *Star*, 29 August 1910. Dorothy Wiseman, “Early Days in the Chatham Islands — the Son of a Missionary Looks Back,” *The New Zealand Railways Magazine*, 1 January 1940, 29. Crops would be slow to ripen, more susceptible to disease, and unsuitable for long-term storage.

⁹⁵ Wiseman, *ibid.* Māori also grew wheat and oats, but potatoes always took precedence in trade.

⁹⁶ Mintz, 70.

⁹⁷ Wiseman, 30. Sr Julianne Hayes-Smith, “Maria – 1819-1866”, in *Forget-Them-Not Our Past: Women of the Chatham Islands: Mahine, Wahine, Frau*, Women of the Chatham Islands, ed. Sr Julianne Hayes-Smith (Glentaniki, N.Z.: Karen McMillan, 1994), 14.

Maria's sense of deprivation was relative to the absence of traditional foods; however, these feelings went beyond selfish yearning. As she raised a family of nine, she was especially troubled by the lack of milk, butter, and cheese.⁹⁸ To her, these foods had deep-seated cultural meanings, and she understood and trusted their life-sustaining and health-giving properties. Maria's dilemma, based on the desire to provide the balanced diet she was accustomed to, shows that resistance to adaptation cannot be solely attributed to cultural arrogance.

Maria had little choice but to overcome her concerns and prejudices, and in her transition to island life, she was helped and supported by Māori women. Simpson claims it took over a century for Pākehā to "relearn and understand the value and pleasure of traditional Māori foodstuffs which the land provides", but evidence suggests this process was shorter in the isolated Chathams.⁹⁹ Maria was befriended by Hatareti, who taught her to speak Māori. In return, Maria shared her medical knowledge.¹⁰⁰ As a mission garden was established, it is safe to say that the gathering and sharing of food, the most basic of life's necessities, became the women's mission in common. Maria's experience appears as a common pattern of food experience for newcomers to the Chathams. After an initial sense of deprivation came acceptance, consolation, and even satisfaction. Ruth Canter admitted she found the diet "a trifle monotonous" at first, but it was fresh fruit she longed for the most. Days of cloudless blue skies were so rare there was never enough sun to ripen fruit in any quantity. Ruth soon discovered the delights of foraging at the shore, where "fresh fish and raw shellfish of every kind, succulent oysters of exquisite flavour, and sea eggs" were dripping from the pools. These were a tasty compensation, and Ruth conceded the lack of fruit was not as serious as first imagined.¹⁰¹ Those prepared to adapt the palate could enjoy the food the Chathams offered.

The English garden

Incomers strived to establish gardens, and reports suggest conditions were amenable to growing vegetables in many parts of Chatham Island. As early as 1843, shore whaler and trader, William McClatchie, had an extensive "English garden" at Okawa,

⁹⁸ Wiseman, 30. There were no milking cows on the island at that time.

⁹⁹ Simpson, 91.

¹⁰⁰ Wiseman, 29. Hayes-Smith, *ibid.*, 16.

¹⁰¹ Canter.

“superabundant” with “every description of European vegetable”.¹⁰² In 1874, surveyor John Robertson observed European vegetables growing well, but noted gardens were the exception rather than the rule.¹⁰³ From the 1880s, visitors occasionally spoke of beautiful flower and vegetable gardens, and Edward Chudleigh, Katherine Pattison and Sophie Moore made concerted efforts to establish gardens and orchards. It appears only apples and small fruits, such as gooseberries, currents, and strawberries grew well in any quantity.¹⁰⁴ Shelter was vital, and thriving vegetable plots were more likely found around well-established homesteads, or in bush gardens kept by Māori women, areas with sufficient shelter from the wind and salt-spray.¹⁰⁵

With few frosts to contend with, new potatoes might be on the menu as early as October, but not all seasons obliged.¹⁰⁶ Spring often brought strong gales for weeks on end, with heavy rain and hail on occasion. One correspondent noted devastating blizzards from the south, “so biting in their nature” as to “shrivel” the young grass, and setback any early vegetables.¹⁰⁷ At times, plantings were totally decimated, including large areas of potatoes. Disappointments of this kind may explain the decline of the island vegetable garden.¹⁰⁸

Tim Te Aika grew up as part of a large extended family at Rapanui during the 1930s. He remembered the large vegetable garden his grandmother kept by the house, and the gooseberries, cape gooseberries, and currents. Larger crops of corn, pumpkin, and potatoes were grown in a paddock. Like most island households, the family was self-sufficient, apart from some grocery lines such as flour, sugar, and tea.¹⁰⁹ Being without electricity, there were few modern household appliances on the island, and the prohibitive cost of shipping was another deterrent.¹¹⁰ Living without a refrigerator or freezer required careful planning to ensure a supply of vegetables, butter, eggs, and milk throughout the year. Mutton was plentiful and beef available, and seafood too was often on the menu.¹¹¹

¹⁰² “Chatham Islands”, *New Zealand Colonist and Port Nicholson Advertiser*, 1 August 1843.

¹⁰³ Robertson, 82.

¹⁰⁴ “The Chatham Islands”, *EG*, 1 November 1913; “The Chatham Islands”, *HBH*, 18 September 1886.

¹⁰⁵ “Down at the Chathams”, *ST*, 25 July 1901; Sr Julianne Hayes-Smith, foreword to *Forget-Them-Not Our Past: Women of the Chatham Islands: Mahine, Wahine, Frau*, Women of the Chatham Islands, ed. Sr Julianne Hayes-Smith (Glentaniki, N.Z.: Karen McMillan, 1994).

¹⁰⁶ “The Chathams”, *AS*, 19 January 1940.

¹⁰⁷ “Chatham Islands”, *WA*, 22 December 1908.

¹⁰⁸ “Chatham Islands”, *WA*, 19 October 1907.

¹⁰⁹ Tim Te Aika, “Wairua’: Spirit of the Land” (Invercargill: Self-published, 2005).

¹¹⁰ Canter.

¹¹¹ Te Aika.

The young ones were expected to do their share of work about the house and farm, and Tim's most important daily task was milking the cows. Apart from supplying the house, skimmed milk and small potatoes helped raise pigs. Another perpetual chore was keeping a supply of chopped firewood up to the stove. Children roaming the clears sometimes found exposed, waxy deposits of peat, and carried this treasure home to burn fiercely in the stove. Cooking for the family and baking endless loaves of bread meant the stove seldom went cold.¹¹² Baking bread on a coal range without coal was no easy task, and one trusted recipe was used throughout the island. Yeast was homemade, and fermenting hops and potatoes sat on every kitchen mantelpiece, or somewhere near the stove.¹¹³ In 1913, the Reverend Fraer enjoyed delicious bread everywhere he went, whether cooked in a camp oven, colonial oven, range, or American stove. He wondered whether his keen appetite was induced by fresh air, or the custom of having only two to three meals a day, and no morning or afternoon teas in between. Quality of baking aside, the staple diet of "mutton and potatoes and bread, and bread and potatoes and mutton", meant this was definitely "no place for the epicure". Nevertheless, as Fraer noted, "folks seem to thrive on it", and he "never saw a healthier lot of children".¹¹⁴

Mercifully, the flavour of the ubiquitous Chatham Island potato was almost legendary, far superior to any grown in New Zealand. Many varieties, some unknown on the mainland, grew to enormous size.¹¹⁵ In the early twentieth century, exports resumed when markets and shipping permitted, and potatoes were sent as far as England and France.¹¹⁶ Islanders tried different cooking methods, to relieve the monotony. Holmes recalled flax kits of potatoes left in running water until rotted. When drained and dried, these were formed into cakes and fried.¹¹⁷ Holmes found the strong smell quite unpleasant. Larger potatoes were grated and fried as "cakes", and some retained the juice and boiled it down, to make a "sort of cornflour porridge".¹¹⁸

Recalling his tenure as Resident Medical Officer in 1958, Dr W.N. Tucker noted meat and potatoes were still "the standby" in most island households.¹¹⁹ With no butcher, grocer, or fruiterer, and no fresh produce in the stores, food and services taken

¹¹² Te Aika. This type of peat was not readily accessible.

¹¹³ Canter. My mother was given this tried and true recipe the day we arrived in 1967.

¹¹⁴ "Life in the Chathams", *PR*, 25 March 1913.

¹¹⁵ "The Chatham Islands", *WA*, 26 June 1906.

¹¹⁶ "Life in the Chatham Islands", *Rodney and Otamatea Times*, 26 September 1928. According to David Holmes, the last potatoes were exported about 1939.

¹¹⁷ This is a similar process to that described for rotted corn.

¹¹⁸ David Holmes, MS-papers-1681, Chatham Island Papers, ATL.

¹¹⁹ Tucker, 59.

for granted on the mainland were simply not available. There were few processed foods or semi-prepared foods, and sausages were a “rare delicacy”.¹²⁰ Simply put, food must either be found or grown, and this applied to everyone.¹²¹ But as Tucker’s predecessor noted in the early 1950s, this unsophisticated diet, which “by New Zealand standards you would think it was terrible”, actually kept islanders in excellent health, free from “civilized diseases” such as hypertension and ulcers. There were many advantages to an “unprocessed” existence, an easy-going lifestyle devoid of the excesses of “high living”.¹²²

Hunting and fishing

Islanders relied on game and fish to supplement and add variety to the diet, and housewives eagerly anticipated the return of shooting parties.¹²³ Securing sustenance also brought significant social benefits, especially for island men. According to Mintz, food practices serve many purposes, and often convey messages about status, gender, and group membership”.¹²⁴ However, hunting and fishing expeditions on Chatham Island went beyond material need, and even sport and recreation, these were valued too as opportunity for socialisation and male bonding (figure 21). In 1906, a newcomer was astonished at the level of participation, the number of guns in use given the small population.¹²⁵ Regardless of race, wealth, or status, every man with a gun was out sharing in the bounty and the experience. So, while the consumable outcome was important, in the Chathams this appears as secondary to the act of procurement.

Claiming bragging rights, island men clearly liked to share both the outing and the outcome with “outsider” males, and this too might be viewed as an extension of hospitality. Radio station staff were among many treated to memorable hunting and fishing experiences. They were grateful for ducks in season, and swans the year round; the latter offered good shooting as well as making a very fine dish.¹²⁶ Whether short-term residents or visitors, there for business or pleasure, men from all walks of life lauded the island as a “sportsman’s paradise”.¹²⁷ In 1928, for instance, during a five-

¹²⁰ Ibid., 78, 81. Help in the home was almost non-existent in the islands.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² “Halfway to Nowhere - a Flying Visit to the Roaring Forties,” ed. New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation (Auckland, New Zealand 1950s), 18:12. Ref 25864, https://www.ngataonga.org.nz/collections/catalogue/catalogue-item?record_id=195193.18:12

¹²³ “The Chathams”, *AS*, 19 January 1940.

¹²⁴ Mintz, 35.

¹²⁵ “The Chatham Islands”, *WA*, 26 June 1906. The population was less than 400 at that time.

¹²⁶ “The Chatham Islands”, *EG*, 1 November 1913.

¹²⁷ “In the Chathams”, *Sun*, 18 February 1914; “The Chathams”, *AS*, 19 January 1940. This included survey parties, school teachers, politicians, government officials, and many others.

week stay, the “investigation work” of G.W. Wild, a government agricultural instructor, extended to many forms of shooting, hunting and fishing. For Wild, the highpoint was spearing flounders (*Rhombosolea plebeian*) on horseback in Te Whanga Lagoon.¹²⁸ As another explained, “one rides in the daytime armed with a long spear and gets them ... wet, but exciting sport”.¹²⁹



Figure 21: Male bonding c. 1936. Private collection of Bryce Shirtcliffe.

Introduced species often multiplied beyond sustainable levels on the island, and controlling numbers provided more excitement. Large numbers of pigs, cattle, and horses ran wild, and in 1897, one visitor wrote of the thrill of hunting wild pigs on horseback. Riders pursued the pig at speed and shot from the saddle. This was as dangerous as it was exhilarating, as the horse might suddenly become bogged, or step in a hole and come down. Eeling was another popular activity, and in Te Whanga Lagoon, these were so thick in places that horses had difficulty pushing through them. To the newcomer, this was a sight “beyond credulity”, but the eel’s habit of twining themselves around the horses’ legs and causing them to jib with fear was equally unnerving for the

¹²⁸ “Agriculture in Chathams”, *AS*, 21 February 1928; “The Chatham Islands”, *Manawatu Times*, 2 May 1928.

¹²⁹ “Life in the Chatham Islands”, *Rodney and Otamatea Times*, 26 September 1928.

rider.¹³⁰ Eeling expeditions were a firm favourite with Māori. In 1910, it was reported a party of ten might spear well over 3000 in a fortnight, and catches were cured by smoking or drying in the sun.¹³¹

When Walter Hood introduced black swans (*Cygnus atratus*) about 1890, he envisioned these as a food source, but by 1897, large numbers were being shot to keep numbers in check.¹³² Both Māori and Pākehā hunted swans for days on end, returning with birds by the boatload. Often a shy quarry, the most effective method was to lie on a point of land projecting into a lagoon or lake and wait until a bank of swans flew over. This was not always pleasant, as oozing, stinking mud was common along these shores. This was not the only objectionable aspect. With large expanses of inland water, the island was often infested with water rats, and large swarms ran over the recumbent hunters.¹³³

Many swans were eaten fresh, but large quantities were also salted down for future requirements, especially by Māori.¹³⁴ It was difficult to please everyone, however, and in 1909, “in the thick of the shooting season”, the plenitude of ducks and swans prompted a local correspondent to complain, “one gets rather tired of so much game before the season is over” (figure 22).¹³⁵ Soon, yet another game bird would be on offer. In 1905, island farmer James Fougere brought several buff weka (*Gallirallus australis hectori*) from the South Island, thinking they would be “nice to have about”.¹³⁶ Within a few years the population had exploded, and weka were rigorously hunted in May and June. Tim Te Aika remembered the annual harvests of the 1930s. His family aimed to get 100 at every outing, and like many others, kept a trained weka dog to retrieve the birds. Many more hours were involved in plucking, gutting, and preserving the harvest, either by dry salting or steeping in brine.

¹³⁰ “The Chatham Islands”, *AG*, 13 July 1910; “The Chatham Islands”, *WA*, 26 June 1906.

¹³¹ “The Chatham Islands”, *AG*, 13 July 1910. There are two main species of eel (tuna), the endemic longfin and the shortfin eel.

¹³² “Swans in Chathams”, *Bay of Plenty Times*, 27 September 1924; “A Chat About Chatham Island”, *PR*, 10 September 1897.

¹³³ “Chatham Island”, *WA*, 22 June 1909; “The Chatham Islands”, *WA*, 26 June 1906.

¹³⁴ “Swans in the Chathams”, *Clutha Leader*, 5 July 1910.

¹³⁵ “Chatham Island”, *WA*, 22 June 1909.

¹³⁶ Brian Bell, “Birds,” in *The Chatham Islands: Heritage and Conservation* (Christchurch, New Zealand: Canterbury University Press in association with the Dept. of Conservation, 1996), 105. It is believed that between five and twelve weka were brought to the island. Although strictly protected on mainland New Zealand, weka can still be legally taken in the Chatham Islands.



Figure 22: Duck shooters, c. 1935. Private collection of Bryce Shirtcliffe.

Tim also remembered the sociable scene on the beach at Owenga after another annual harvest, when Māori returned from the outer islands with toroa. Water was heated in huge cauldrons, and a large crowd would gather to pluck and prepare the catch.¹³⁷ The cooked birds were packed into casks, and hermetically sealed by steeping in their own fat.¹³⁸ In 1913, while a tourist was enjoying time in this “fishermen’s paradise”, he witnessed the toroa harvest while fishing near the Forty Fours. He was repulsed by the slaughter, but later, at Owenga, he found the processing even more distressing. For weeks afterwards, the stench of decaying entrails from 600 albatrosses “cried aloud to heaven”, and “wafted to the four corners of the earth by every wind that blew”.¹³⁹ This made for an unforgettable sensory experience, of the nauseating kind.

Māori reached the outer islands in whaleboats rowed by full crews of men, and occasionally, women went along as crew or cooks.¹⁴⁰ Whaleboats were less buoyant and

¹³⁷ Te Aika; Richards, 356.

¹³⁸ Te Aika. The fat was carefully drawn off for this purpose during the process. From about 1885 to 1907, huge quantities of preserved toroa, titi, swans, ducks, eels, and feathers were sent by Ngati Mutunga in the Chathams to Te Whiti and his followers at Parihaka.

¹³⁹ “A Trip to the Forty-Fours”, *ODT*, 1 March 1913.

¹⁴⁰ “Chatham Islands”, *NZH*, 16 October 1895.

more susceptible to damage than korari, so these voyages were undertaken at considerable risk.¹⁴¹ Sometimes, in rough seas, an incoming steamer took boatloads of exhausted birders in tow, and returned them safely to shore.¹⁴² Occasionally, Māori chartered a schooner for the expedition.¹⁴³ After the tragic drownings in 1900, birding ceased for a number of years, and only resumed when cod fishing brought motor boats to the islands.

Preserved toroa were a delicacy to Māori, but the strong flavour was less appealing to the Pākehā palate.¹⁴⁴ In 1904, Frank Bullen, a British novelist and writer, described the taste of fresh albatross as, “very rank”, with the “oily flavour of stale fish” making it “quite uneatable to the ordinary person”.¹⁴⁵ Yet, it seems the fisherman visiting the Chathams in 1913 was not averse to trying it, despite his negative perceptions. “Albatross chicks are about the size of a good fat Christmas goose”, he wrote, but “infinitely sweeter and more tender”.¹⁴⁶

In addition to providing meat, black swans lay tens of thousands of eggs along the lakeshores every year, and one doctor found that both swans and swan-egging were “a welcome reason to leave work and enjoy oneself”.¹⁴⁷ Men, women and children, both Māori and Pākehā, gathered many hundreds of eggs in a day.¹⁴⁸ As a pre-schooler in the early 1960s, Rena May Hough rode in and around the lagoons gathering swan eggs with her grandmother.¹⁴⁹ She was secured behind the saddle in a split sack, or piko bag.¹⁵⁰ One egg was equivalent to at least five hen’s eggs, and the flavour was equally good.¹⁵¹ These preserved well, and were used in baking throughout the year.¹⁵² One was considered too much for breakfast, but Māori children travelling some distance to school often took a hard-boiled swan’s egg for lunch. As one witty correspondent quipped, these were “compact, convenient, and satisfying, what more could anyone desire?” He

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² “The Chathams”, *Star*, 13 May 1891.

¹⁴³ “A Trip to the Forty-Fours”.

¹⁴⁴ “New Zealand Spectator and Cook’s Strait Guardian”, *New Zealand Spectator and Cooks Strait Guardian*, 8 May 1847.

¹⁴⁵ “The Albatross at Home”, *ODT*, 7 October 1904.

¹⁴⁶ “A Trip to the Forty-Fours”.

¹⁴⁷ Tucker, 78.

¹⁴⁸ “Chatham Islands Notes”, *Star*, 29 August 1910; The Chatham Islands., *EG*, 1 November 1913.

¹⁴⁹ Rena Ellen (Ellen) Goomes, nee Daymond, was born at Teroto Pa, Chatham Island in 1909. She died in 1984.

¹⁵⁰ Karen McMillan, “Ellen - 1909-1984”, in *Forget-Them-Not Our Past: Women of the Chatham Islands: Mahine, Wahine, Frau*, Women of the Chatham Islands, ed. Sr Julianne Hayes-Smith (Glentaniki, N.Z.: Karen McMillan, 1994), 37.

¹⁵¹ “Chatham Islands”, *WA*, 19 October 1907; Canter. Estimates of size range from four to seven hen eggs.

¹⁵² Canter.

also noted the percentage of rotten eggs that lay along the lakeshores, and true to the waste not, want not ethos, thought these too could be put to good use, if only elections were held on the island.¹⁵³

Hunting and fishing, and an otherwise limited diet, tend to dominate the record in relation to food in the Chathams. This is hardly surprising, given most are visitor accounts, most visitors were men, and men were more likely to take an interest in masculine pursuits. By comparison, there are relatively few sources detailing the social consumption of food. While this reinforces the impression that eating was less socially relevant than the act of obtaining wild foods, it also has the effect of minimising the importance of social consumption. However, we can assume, that although poor mobility prevented regular large-scale social gatherings, food was a vital component of events both large and small.

Informal gatherings likely took place all about the island, but it appears formal events which included a meal were rare. Hotel proprietors catered for those that did eventuate, such as the Chatham Islands Jockey Club annual member's dinner, or the occasional reunion of returned soldiers.¹⁵⁴ Interestingly, the other attractions of boat day seem to overshadow the mundane activity of eating, but presumably the hotel kitchens were busy. Larger celebrations and more inclusive gatherings were likely to feature a hāngi (earth oven).¹⁵⁵ This was the case for peace celebrations in 1919, and the centennial of 1940.¹⁵⁶ Hangi became an essential element of hosting important guests, such as high-ranking clergy or representatives of the Crown, being eminently practical in catering for larger numbers, and making effective use of natural resources (figure 23).¹⁵⁷ This placed less reliance on expensive imported foodstuffs, which were not always in plentiful supply. In this setting, hangi were as much about collecting and sharing food from many sources, and the skill, pride, and humorous stories behind its growth or capture. These aspects of sociability were every bit as important as the enjoyment of gathering and mingling.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³ "Chatham Islands", *WA*, 19 October 1907. Swan feathers were also worth keeping. In 1910, a pressed bale of boiled and dried feathers fetched about £9, over four times the weekly wage for a labourer.

¹⁵⁴ "Chatham Island Notes", *PR*, 12 November 1919; "Chatham Islands", *NZH*, 24 January 1877; "The Chatham Islands", *Star*, 21 January 1885.

¹⁵⁵ A traditional New Zealand Māori method of cooking, hāngi use heated rocks buried in a pit oven or umu. Hāngi are still popular for large groups on special occasions.

¹⁵⁶ "Chatham Island Notes", *ibid.*; "The Centennial", *PR*, April 1940.

¹⁵⁷ Lord and Lady Jellicoe, *NZH*, 24 June 1922; "The Chathams", *PR*, 21 January 1928. This included Prince Phillip, the Duke of Edinburgh, who visited the island on race day, 1956.

¹⁵⁸ These later comments are based on my own experience of hāngi on Chatham Island, and on those of other family members.



Figure 23: A hangi for the Bishop, c. 1936. William B. Burt. Private collection of Bryce Shirtcliffe.

From 1949, flying boats began to visit, and the airbase took on a festive atmosphere for these occasions. Flying boat day became just as important as boat day. Everyone took the day off, and schools closed for the day, but now with better roads, even larger crowds could gather. Sheltered by bush, the airbase was a pleasant spot, and these days turned into a picnic, especially if the plane was delayed. Islanders loved a picnic, and sandwiches, cakes, and scones were always freely available, along with copious cups of tea.¹⁵⁹ As expert cooks and bakers, women viewed food and refreshment as a natural extension of hospitality, a basic tenet of care. As Ada Hough explained, it was “the done thing to cater for people who had to travel long distances”. She remembered her mother working like a well-oiled machine in the kitchen preparing for flying boat day, as well as race day, weddings, funerals, and other special events.¹⁶⁰

Mete likened the advent of flying boats to opening a new door into the world, and especially in relation to food.¹⁶¹ Children waited excitedly as air crews handed out free

¹⁵⁹ Mete, 28.

¹⁶⁰ McMillan, 32. Ada was a daughter of Rena Ellen Goomes.

¹⁶¹ Mete, 27.

ice creams; this was like Santa Claus arriving, and eskimo pies “literally melted away” in young mouths (figure 24).¹⁶² Crews brought other rare treats, such as sausages, oranges, and bananas; sold at cost price, a long queue was always waiting.¹⁶³ It was a great novelty to order and receive perishable foodstuffs. Mete remembered travelling home on the back of the family truck, along with packages of sausages, saveloys, fruit, tomatoes, cucumbers, and a large roll of Belgium sausage. This all proved too much for the children during the two-hour journey. Overcome by temptation, not all the goodies reached their destination.¹⁶⁴



Figure 24: Ice creams at the airbase, c. 1940. Private collection of Bryce Shirtcliffe.

On a sweeter note, island children seldom had access to confectionary and other childhood treats. Edward Baucke recalled the excitement of the missionary children when whaling ships arrived during the 1860s. Craving black molasses, “the only

¹⁶² Ibid. and “*Halfway to Nowhere - A Flying Visit to the Roaring Forties*”, by Dick Gutteridge and Patrick Smyth, New Zealand Broadcasting Service, 1950s, https://www.ngataonga.org.nz/collections/catalogue/catalogue-item?record_id=195193. Eskimo pies took several forms, but those shown in Figure 24 are simply single-serve packages of ice cream, eaten with a supplied spoon.

¹⁶³ “Ice Cream for the Chathams”, *PR*, 2 November 1951.

¹⁶⁴ Mete, 28.

sweetstuff and luxury they ever knew”, trading calls were the highlight of “lonely and uneventful lives ... to their sweet starved little palates it was nectar of the gods indeed!”.¹⁶⁵ There was no shop at Owenga during Mete’s childhood years, so when she finally got to “town” at 12 years of age, her first purchase was a bar of chocolate.¹⁶⁶ Wyeth’s store “was like wonderland” to children, she explained, “we just stood and gazed at the boiled lollies of many colours inside these big glass jars – a lure for any child, especially us Owenga natives”. Shrewdly displayed “slap bang in the middle of the counter”, it “was enough to make any child salivate”.¹⁶⁷ When Mete attended her first movie sessions in the Waitangi Hall, she was as excited about her first raspberry soft drink in a glass bottle as she was about seeing the movie.¹⁶⁸ Improving mobility meant new experiences for children, and especially for the taste buds.

Conclusion

Infrastructure was extremely slow to develop on Chatham Island, but despite these shortcomings, and in fact because of them, community developed in unique ways, in keeping with the island lifestyle and environment. Purpose built buildings may not have materialised, but these were surmountable problems, and people generally “made do”. Community bonds were forged through diversions and amusements, held in whatever venue fitted the purpose. However, without doubt, the arrival of a ship was the most important island event, and the relevance of boat day goes almost without saying. Only the annual horse races came close in terms of sociability. Boat day was a time of promise in so many respects, and the most powerful incentive drawing people together in one place. Still, as shown in the following chapter, not everyone could attend.

As Dr Tucker noted in 1958, the mundane tasks of housekeeping, keeping alive and staying warm occupied “a lot more time than one would wish” on Chatham Island. Every island home needed to be self-sufficient and independent, and Tucker believed mainlanders with access to shops and services had forgotten the time-consuming business of growing or finding all their food.¹⁶⁹ As the next chapter shows, this impacted most on island women.¹⁷⁰ While women remained on the periphery of food gathering practices, Tucker recognised that in the living larder of the Chathams, the shared

¹⁶⁵ Wiseman, 30.

¹⁶⁶ Mete, 66.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 68.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 66.

¹⁶⁹ Tucker, 78.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 78, 81. Paid help in the home was almost non-existent in the islands.

experience of hunting and food gathering held immense social benefits for men.¹⁷¹ Food stood firmly at the core of cultural material practice, traversing cultural and racial boundaries for those partaking of the experience.

This was not always the case, however, as earlier Pākehā like Chudleigh and Lyne clearly found naturally occurring foods somehow beneath them. Their rejection of food gathering practices reflects the dismissive attitude of Pākehā, the social and racial boundaries symbolised by food. Yet, being so far from shops and markets, Pākehā on the island were perhaps more willing to put matters of “taste” aside, to experiment, and to meld life’s rhythms to nature’s food clock. No doubt this process was hastened by the universal, basic need to eat, and over time, food became less of an emblem of cultural difference, and more a basis for socialising.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 78.

Chapter 7: Community: Health and Care

Growing community on Chatham Island was no easy task. This was a small, scattered, and disparate population, with limited resources, and people seldom agreed on what best served the islanders as a whole. A meeting held in Waitangi in 1875 highlights this problem. Edward Chudleigh mooted the prospect of establishing an Anglican church. Predictably, this was not supported by adherents of other Christian denominations, but the meeting also exposed another significant obstacle, an inordinate fear of rates and taxes. Dissenters prophesied no end of trouble if a parson was appointed. Some less-wealthy settler farmers claimed this would soon be followed by other costly institutions, such as a county council or roads board, and they would be shouldered with the financial burden.¹

Residents valued communal development in a material sense, but clearly, community building was not dependent on physical structures, institutions, or formal mechanisms. Neither could it be. Here, I look to matters of life and death, to argue that sustaining health and well-being were stronger uniting forces within this community. In dealing with sickness and disease, islanders recognised a shared sense of vulnerability, which generated conversation and led to action. The emotions involved proved a great galvanizer and leveller in a place where professional medical care was simply not accessible at times.

Under these conditions, survival often depended on local expertise, and care took many forms on Chatham Island. Granted, these roles were not limited to women, but this chapter foregrounds aspects of women's lives which might otherwise remain behind the scenes. Carolyn Mincham claims the horse was "a lively friend for women escaping the strictures of Victorian domestic life in colonial New Zealand".² Using a range of women's experiences, I argue that in this island setting, the horse was much more than an agent of freedom. On the premise that moving in unity with a horse generates a sense of empowerment, a therapeutic elevation of the spirit, I argue, that for island women, building a relationship of trust with a horse was enabling in beneficial ways. The freedom gained helped to promote women's well-being, and made gendered limitations more tolerable. For this reason, the horse/woman relationship functioned as a form of

¹ "Chatham Islands", *Daily Southern Cross*, 21 August 1875.

² Carolyn J. Mincham, "A Social and Cultural History of the New Zealand Horse" (PhD diss., Massey University, New Zealand, 2008), 4.

self-care. This in turn provided the stimulus and means to care for others within the community.

Women's lives

The previous chapter showed small pockets of population coming together to socialize in homes and any other venue on offer. For many, distance restricted access to school or church, and until further schools were built from 1908, there was no centralizing, uniting focus for residents in outlying areas. Given the lack of roads, and long journeys on horseback, there were limited options for more inclusive communal gatherings, especially for women. In this situation, the role of the horse in facilitating community and support networks cannot be underestimated. Without the horse, women seldom moved beyond localized areas, but as Mete noted, "the men folk got around, in fact, they seemed to enjoy it".³ Many women's lives were contained and constrained until the early 1970s, when further roads were built.

Given the large number of horses on the island, to the newcomer it appeared that "everyone" converged on Waitangi for boat day, and "everyone" rode a horse. In reality, few women experienced this degree of mobility, for a number of reasons. In the absence of wheeled transport, older women like Elizabeth Shand, physically frail and no longer able to ride, were seldom able to leave their home environs.⁴ Some women did not have ready access to a horse, had never learned to ride, or chose not to. Jeannie Holmes, for instance, and her daughter-in-law Joyce, never rode horses. Living on a farm on the outskirts of Waitangi, household chores took up much of the day, but on Sundays, attending evensong was non-negotiable for the family. The Anglican Church, three miles away at Te One, was reached by walking along the beach. If the tide was out, it was possible to cross the river at the mouth, otherwise, a long diversion must be made through paddocks to reach the beach on the far side. Hurricane lanterns were always carried. Visits to neighbours and friends also took place in the evenings, more often at full moon or on clear moonlit nights with better visibility.⁵

³ Val Mete, *Growing up a Chatham Islander: On the Edge of 44 Degrees South* (Nukaka N.Z.: Island Moonlight Pub., 2012), xiii.

⁴ This was deduced from comments made by Katherine Pattison and Edward Chudleigh.

⁵ Karen McMillan, "Jeannie - 1881-1954", in *Forget-Them-Not Our Past: Women of the Chatham Islands: Mahine, Wahine, Frau*, ed. Sr Julianne Hayes-Smith (Glentaniki, N.Z.: Karen McMillan, 1994), 26-27. Jeannie was the mother of David Holmes, and wife of policeman Ryan Holmes, who was later RM. The Holmes stayed on to farm near Waitangi.

With the responsibility of children, it was not so easy for mothers to connect with people in this way. Unless willing and able to carry a baby or small child aboard the horse, a mother's mobility was significantly impaired. Māori women appear to have managed this better than Pākehā (Figure 25). It was difficult to travel with any number of young children, and mobility did not improve until children were old enough to ride independently for some distance. As a small child in the 1930s, Tim Te Aika remembered being firmly secured in a blanket behind his grandmother, so as not to fall off if he fell asleep. Tim travelled this way until old enough to ride his own horse.⁶ Nevertheless, facilities at Waitangi suggest women were not expected there in any number. Social activity centred around two hotels, and there were no female amenities until 1940, when a rest and writing room were incorporated into a new memorial hall.⁷



Figure 25: Māori women and children, some on horses. George Romeril Album. Photographs relating to Chatham Islands. PA1-o-1333-39, Alexander Turnbull Library.

⁶ Tim Te Aika, *Wairua: Spirit of the Land* (Invercargill: Self-published, 2005).

⁷ "The Centennial", *PR*, 29 April 1940.

Island visitors, such as the Reverend Bowen, were shocked to find women in outlying areas spending the greater part of their lives in virtual isolation. In 1874, he visited the island's southern-most dwelling at Tuku. "Deeply buried" in bush, it was reached by a narrow winding path. Even Rayner, Bowen's competent guide, happily accepted a neighbour's offer to lead them to this "Robinson Crusoe's retreat".⁸ Bowen was astonished to find Jane Aukland "absolutely alone!" Her carpenter husband worked away from home for weeks or months on end, and having no children, "this female recluse" divided her time between outdoor and indoor tasks. Jane was found clearing bush for a new enclosure. She was pleased to receive visitors, and insisted on cooking a meal, chattering away as she caught up with all the news.⁹ Bowen could not imagine a life "more primitive or independent", yet, "she spoke quite cheerfully and contentedly of her lot".¹⁰ In another remote spot, cut off from direct communication with Waitangi by "impossible swamps", he found Jessie Jacobs alone with her children. Her husband was also working elsewhere.¹¹ She was glad of the company, telling Bowen she had "not seen a white woman for more than a year".¹²

Women and children often managed households and farms in the absence of men. In 1994, the candid words of seventy-nine-year-old Ngawhata Page, a respected local identity, leave little doubt as to how women interpreted the limitations of duty and isolation. "The Chatham Islands were a man's paradise", she wrote, "the women worked very hard. They had to, as the men were the hunters, the providers of food for the whanau".¹³ According to Page, women not only shouldered the burden of domestic labour, but were also "left to do all the work around the home".¹⁴ She referred to all those tasks required to keep the household functioning, such as milking cows, chopping wood, and keeping vegetable gardens. While these were not unusual expectations for rural women in New Zealand, it was the extent of heavy farm work done by women, and the level of "left to do" that surprised outside observers. However, those familiar with

⁸ Bowen, 26-27.

⁹ Ibid. This was Jane Ann Aukland, wife of John Aukland, who lived on Chatham Island from about 1866 and later returned to Christchurch. Bowen spelled the name "Auckland".

¹⁰ Bowen, 27.

¹¹ Bowen, 9.

¹² Bowen, 10.

¹³ Foreword to Julianne Hayes-Smith, ed. *Forget-Them-Not Our Past: Women of the Chatham Islands: Mahine, Wahine, Frau* (Glentaniki, N.Z.: Karen McMillan, 1994). This publication was part of New Zealand's Women's Suffrage Centennial commemorations.

¹⁴ Ibid.

island culture understood that women had little choice but to keep the home fires burning, in every respect.¹⁵

This point was lost on geographer Colin Dennison, who surveyed in-island mobility in 1963. Dennison found that only a small percentage of women had travelled extensively about the island. From 1950, the road between Waitangi and Owenga encouraged greater movement between these centres, but still, over one third of women from those areas had never been to other settlements, such as Waitangi West, Wharekauri, and Kaingaroa, despite kinship ties to these places. On the other hand, almost all the men had traversed the island, citing farming and employment as reasons for travel.¹⁶ The men failed to mention excursions related to hunting and fishing, customs firmly built into the male way of life.

Dennison made certain assumptions based on this data, claiming women's limited mobility stemmed from a "marked lack of interest in other parts of the island". He believed this was due to a "supposed lack of geographic distinctiveness throughout".¹⁷ By assuming this was a matter of choice, he failed to consider gender constraints set firmly in place, or women's heavy workloads. Others were more circumspect. When Fr. Gerald Arbuckle studied island culture in the early 1970s, he observed men leaving homes and families for days at a time, without even telling wives where they were going, or how long they would be away.¹⁸ Mete remembered what happened when men returned from periods away on fishing boats. Waitangi Hotel was often the "first port of call", and for some, this extended to a three-day binge. While she does not elaborate, Mete implies that subsequent reunions were stressful for wives and families. To her, the women working behind the scenes were the true "heroines" of the place, struggling on with few conveniences and comforts.¹⁹

Arbuckle also referred to the "frontier nature" of women's lives. With none of the amenities of town or city, women managed remarkably well under trying conditions.²⁰ Given heavy demands, they understandably had little time, and perhaps even less inclination, to look to the "niceties" of sophisticated living.²¹ In 1960, the resident doctor

¹⁵ Mete, 39. Gerald A. Arbuckle, *The Chatham Islands in Perspective - a Socio-Economic Review* (Wellington: Hicks Smith, 1971), 51.

¹⁶ Colin George Dennison, "The Chatham Islands: A Study of Community and Economy in an Isolated Setting (MA Thesis, University of Otago, 1966), 62.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁸ Arbuckle, 51.

¹⁹ Mete, 39.

²⁰ Arbuckle, 51.

²¹ *Ibid.*

noted the tedium of their existence. Most were married young and soon had a family to care for. This left little time to “follow other pursuits”, and the outlook for the young mother was “one of hard work and frustration”.²²

Few island women would contest Page’s comments, but few have chosen to elucidate, or speak openly of women’s condition. Histories of island women, such as *Forget Them Not Our Past*, leave large silences about those with fewer choices or opportunities, or who coped less well.²³ Instead, it lauds those who were stoic, resilient, and physically strong, women able to work like men.²⁴ Here, I approach women’s lives from another angle, to argue, that at least in part, frustrations and limitations were alleviated by access to a horse.

Women’s mobility

Considering limited mobility, how did women find and share in the support of other women? Some women were more privileged than others, and could afford some household help, but this did not necessarily release them from family-oriented constraints, or allow for improved mobility. The experiences of Katherine Pattisson highlight the limitations imposed. A genteel young Englishwoman, Katherine arrived as a new bride in 1874, and spent over four years on Wharekauri Station. During that time, she gave birth to four children, including one set of twins. She existed within a very small ambit, walking about near the homestead, and occasionally taking the children to the beach below. She never travelled to Waitangi. The Pattissons employed some domestic help, but this was seldom consistent or reliable, and much of Katherine’s time was taken up with domestic duties and childcare. Realising her predicament, the Shand women at Te Whakuru offered friendship and support, the unmarried daughters riding over often to visit, and acting as go-betweens in relaying advice on baby care requested from their mother. Katherine was loaned a well-mannered horse, but seldom had opportunity to ride.²⁵ Twice the Pattissons were invited to spend Christmas at Te Whakuru. This entailed a slow, rough journey by sledge, which Katherine found most

²² W. N. Tucker, “The Chatham Islands,” *New Zealand Medical Journal* 59, no. February 1960 (1960): 77.

²³ J. Hayes-Smith, *Forget-Them-Not Our Past: Women of the Chatham Islands: Mahine, Wāhine, Frau* (Karen McMillan, 1993).

²⁴ According to Phillip Conkling, this is a common feature of many island communities throughout the world.

²⁵ Katherine mentions only one outing on horseback when she rode over part of the station with her husband.

uncomfortable, and upset the children terribly. All-in-all, it seems these outings were not the relaxing change of scene intended.²⁶

By the time Mabel Chudleigh arrived at Wharekauri in 1881, the Pattissons had returned to live in England. Mabel kept busy for the next 26 years, taking care of her household and those around her. While few men were interested in the more ordinary lives of women, Edward Chudleigh was one notable exception. His diary is littered with praise for “dear little wife”.²⁷ The couple had no children, and together spent many hours establishing an extensive homestead garden, complete with tennis court. Edward was immensely proud of Mabel’s accomplishments, both in and out of doors, and even recorded details of her busy life. In February 1890, for example, “little wife” walked about all afternoon, grubbing thistles and gardening until dark, “I never saw any woman work and get through what she can and does it every day all the year round”.²⁸ A few months later he wrote,

Her visitors have gone. She has done all the work herself for from 8 to 9 people for over a week, cooking for two houses and keeping every room bright in our own. This day she has cooked for herself and me and the three station hands. Made 9 loaves of excellent bread, 1 cake, 5 pies, 4 pasties, 1 tart, cooked 5 wild duck; washed 10 blankets and 15 aprons and some dusters, showed Mrs Wishart how to work a sewing machine; dairy as usual; milked 5 cows and cleaned visitors rooms. I do not know the other woman that could do it and have a bright face on it”.²⁹

Mabel’s voice is absent from the record, but it appears her life was much less circumscribed than Katherine’s. Edward often mentions her riding about the station, and dashing off on errands of mercy.³⁰ Occasionally she visited Waitangi for boat day, and friends mention her coming to stay.³¹ But clearly, the highlight of her life was hosting friends and family from New Zealand. She rode extensively with guests to show

²⁶ Katherine Jane Pattisson, 1849-1881: Diary Transcript. Ref: MSDL-0806, ATL, 24 July 1873 -30 August 1878.

²⁷ Mabel was the daughter of Thomas Henry Potts and Eliza Phillips, who arrived in Canterbury in 1854. Thomas, the wealthy son of an English small arms manufacturer, held pastoral leases in Canterbury, but is better known as an early naturalist and conservationist. The family lived comfortably at Ōhinetahi, Governors Bay. Mabel’s grandfather, Henry Phillips was a prominent Canterbury capitalist, with extensive city and rural land holdings. “Little wife” was never intended to belittle, but refers to Mabel’s tiny stature.

²⁸ E. R. Chudleigh, *Diary of E.R. Chudleigh, 1862-1921: Chatham Islands*, ed. Eva Carlisle Richards (Christchurch: Simpson and Williams, 1950), 370.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 371.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 303, 72, 78.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 303. Sophia to Tubby, 2 April 1890, MS-papers-10850, Moore Family Letters, ATL. Tubby was a pet name for her sister Louisa.

them about the area. These social outings with company were a welcome interlude in an otherwise “rather dreary life”.³²

For Marion, wife of Major Gascoyne, the horse was a means of delivering civic care and community service. Although sickly on arrival, Marion’s health improved immensely on the island, and she soon found outlets for renewed energy. Social events were rare, and with a mind to island welfare, she organised gatherings, such as a successful fancy dress ball and concert at Waitangi on New Year’s Eve 1892.³³ To overcome “clumsy” communication, she rode all over the island delivering invitations, in fact, Marion was such a good organiser, that behind the scenes people quietly referred to her as the Major, rather than her husband.³⁴

Marion was often accompanied by her seventeen-year-old niece. Caroline Gascoyne may have simply viewed the horse as an agent of freedom, but as I argue, and she learned, keeping safe and enjoying this environment depended on a relationship of trust with a horse. Caroline spent several years on the island in the early 1880s, and later told her family about this character-building interlude. She attended most social functions, but her uncle forbade her to dance, in case she found herself with a “rough or otherwise unsuitable partner”. She did not appreciate being a “spectator only”, and thought her uncle was overprotective.³⁵ Without the usual entertainments available to her in South Canterbury, she found island life rather stifling.

Caroline was an accomplished horsewoman, and thankfully, her riding on the island was not restricted; without this, she claimed, her days would have been long and dreary indeed. She rode out often, “in search of adventure or merely to enjoy the exercise and breathe the fresh cool air”.³⁶ Her uncle, aware of hidden dangers such as peat fires, quicksand, and bogs, insisted she was always accompanied by a young Māori boy in his employ. When the adults took a siesta in the early afternoon, Caroline saddled her horse Dick Deadeye, called her companion, and rode away. She grew very fond of Dick, and trusted him implicitly when covering dangerous ground. She was heartbroken when he died through no fault of her own. There were other horses, “but none could take the place of her first companion, old Dick”.³⁷

³² Sophia to Tubby, 2 April 1890.

³³ “Chatham Islands”, *Star*, 12 January 1892.

³⁴ Miller, 62. “A Second Visit to Chatham Islands”, *PR*, 17 February 1892.

³⁵ Miller, 62. Caroline, the daughter of a merchant and farmer, came from Waimate, South Canterbury.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 63

Another mount proved less trustworthy. The horse shied violently, for no apparent reason, and Caroline screamed in terror as it stepped sideways into a concealed bog. Struggling to get free, the horse sank deeper in the mire. Her companion drew alongside, told her to hold on tight, and gave the horse “a strong cut with his whip”. The desperate horse lunged forward and struggled onto firm land, “but it was never quite the same again as its heart was strained in the effort”.³⁸ This upset Caroline, but in time she settled to other amusements, such as sketching and painting bird and plant life, playing the piano, and sewing and reading. Yet despite the dangers, she continued to ride about the island. This was her means of escaping the restrictions placed on a leisured young lady, and the highlight of her stay.³⁹

For other young women, mobility on horseback meant more than temporary freedom and independence, it allowed for life enriching experiences. Val Mete had happy memories of childhood years at Owenga, but nevertheless, sometimes hints at frustration over leading such an isolated and contained existence.⁴⁰ Throughout her childhood, her world view was limited to Owenga and its environs. Until the 1950s, women and children from the village seldom travelled to Waitangi, even for important social events such as the annual race meeting. However, being left at home was a welcome excuse to desert the village, to relax, and create their own brand of fun. Mete’s Nan would pack food, harness the bullock team, and gather small children. Joined by riders young and old, a procession made its way to pleasant places like Shelly Beach, some three miles away. Children paddled in the stream and played hide and seek in the bush, while adults prepared a kōtutu (boil-up). Paua and taere (a small mussel) were gathered from the rocks.⁴¹ Although these outings lasted only a few hours, they left many pleasing memories (figure 26).⁴²

It was not until 1950, when Mete was 12 years old, that she was considered old enough to ride to Waitangi. Glad to escape on her trustworthy pony Magpie, she was excited to visit a shop for the first time, and to join in the excitement of boat day.⁴³ She enjoyed it all the more because of her relationship of trust with her pony. Riders sometimes set off for home a little late in the day, but she always felt safe, because Magpie was “so clever in the dark”. The pony sensed and negotiated every watercourse

³⁸ Ibid., 62.

³⁹ Ibid., 64.

⁴⁰ Mete, 15.

⁴¹ Ibid., 14-15.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 107.

and hazard, and Mete “only had to loosen the reins and let her go”. On moonlit nights, weka darted about “squealing and squeaking”, but Magpie never faltered. Her grandfather also relied on Magpie to keep her from harm, and never worried over their late return. In later years, she realised how fortunate they were to have these “good safe horses”.⁴⁴ Still, when Mete left for secondary schooling in New Zealand at the age of 14, she had not seen any other part of the island. She knew very little about these other places, but this was a matter of circumstance, and not a matter of choice.



Figure 26: Owenga children on horses, n.d. Private collection of Bryce Shirtcliffe.

Women like Ellen Goomes took whatever opportunity presented to escape life’s burdens. She was the perfect example of the lauded, versatile island woman, capable of heavy farm work and running the property, while raising a large family.⁴⁵ Her skills with an axe and gun earned respect, but no more than her skills in the kitchen. Ellen was a legendary cook and caterer, and much admired for her many capabilities.⁴⁶ Throughout her life, horses were Ellen’s constant companions, and she liked nothing better than to set off around her favourite haunts; swan-egging was a particularly

⁴⁴ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁵ Karen McMillan, “Ellen - 1909-1984”, in *Forget-Them-Not Our Past: Women of the Chatham Islands: Mahine, Wahine, Frau*, Women of the Chatham Islands, ed. Sr Julianne Hayes-Smith (Glentaniki, N.Z.: Karen McMillan, 1994), 37.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 31, 33, 35.

rewarding outing.⁴⁷ She rode until the age of 75, a year before her death, but found her last days hard to bear without those special outings on horseback.⁴⁸ In contrast to the “power over” dimension generally prevailing in relationships with men, a “power with” relationship with a horse was enabling and liberating. One can imagine that this form of freedom was as much about self-care as it was about temporary independence, or temporary empowerment.⁴⁹

Women coming to the island in various service roles provided an alternative example of what women’s lives could be. Useful women, who were also inclusive and accepting of others, found a ready place within the community. Being seen to cope with and enjoy the island environment also earned respect, and horses often played their part. In 1901, Frances Chatwin of Wellington was teaching assistant at Te One School. In her early forties, Frances embraced the outdoors, walking the beaches and riding all over the island. She felt her teaching role made her very much “part of the life of the community”. She attended many social gatherings, where babies slept on benches around the hall, and people danced “the barn dance, the schottische, polka and waltz”, to the music of the concertina and piano.⁵⁰

Little had changed by 1946, when Muriel Phillips arrived as matron of the “tiny” cottage hospital. A horse was waiting at the wharf, but she had never ridden, and politely declined. After struggling on foot through the “famous Waitangi mud”, Muriel realised her nursing skills would be useless there unless she learned to ride. Initially, she suffered some undignified landings, but matters progressed when a local farmer loaned a well-mannered pony. Muriel grew “very much attached” to Silvertail, and was soon travelling confidently, visiting outlying stations to call on patients, and occasionally assisting with transfers to hospital across the clears in a kōnake.⁵¹ Invited to weddings and other festivities, she described the place and people as “hospitable, unique and interesting”.⁵² It appears that her “can do” attitude, and willingness to adapt stood her in good stead with the local community. Certainly, farewell functions for people like

⁴⁷ Ibid., 30-31.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 33.

⁴⁹ See H. Sharpe and T. Strong, *Embodied Relating and Transformation: Tales from Equine-Facilitated Counseling* (Sense Publishers, 2015).

⁵⁰ Community Life in the Chathams: Social Days of Fifty Years Ago”, Auckland Weekly News, c. 1950, insert in MS-Papers-0434-58/1, Scrapbook - Chatham Island Miscellany, William Burt Beverland Collection, ATL. Frances shared her memories 50 year later.

⁵¹ Muriel Phillips, “Nursing in the Chathams”, St Laurence News, 1956, enclosure in MS-Papers-0434-58/1, Scrapbook - Chatham Island Miscellany, William Burt Beverland Collection, ATL.

⁵² Ibid.

Frances and Muriel were universally attended, and the presentation of meaningful gifts suggests their efforts were highly valued.⁵³

The education and skills of women like Frances and Muriel did not go unnoticed. Given the lifestyles and poor mobility of island women, it is hardly surprising mothers wished to broaden their daughter's horizons. From about 1909, a small number of Māori girls were selected to attend Te Wai Pounamu College in Canterbury. Established by the Reverend Fraer, who had a strong interest in the Chathams, courses were designed to equip young women to improve the lives of their people.⁵⁴ From 1902, a limited number of scholarships were also available for Māori boys to attend Te Aute College in Hawkes Bay, and for Pākehā children to be sent to mainland secondary schools.⁵⁵ In 1952, Dr Tucker noted island mothers were especially keen for daughters to attend secondary school on the mainland.⁵⁶

Notably, in 1954, at a special meeting of the Māori Women's Welfare League, members celebrated the organisation's first birthday. Three young island women, who were pupils at Te Wai Pounamu College, were home on holiday, and entertained with traditional Māori songs and poi dancing. Their presence, along with Māori crafts on display, suggests the league had ignited a shared reinvestment in traditional cultural values.⁵⁷ It also indicates that better support networks were taking shape, and through the example of educated women, island daughters might expect a better future.

Fair winds, ill winds

Perhaps the most important support networks in the Chathams were those related to health and well-being. Medical care, or the lack of it, affected women, men, and children, and the shared need to maintain good health was guaranteed to get everyone talking. There were conflicting opinions over whether the environment, climate, and isolation made this a healthy or dangerous place to be. As James Beattie notes, from 1840, fresh air and dry climate were endorsed as having mysterious healing qualities, and the potential to prevent tuberculosis.⁵⁸ Some were eager to stake a claim on the Chathams

⁵³ "Chatham Islands", *PR*, 4 August 1924; "Community Life in the Chathams"; "Chatham Island Notes", *PR*, 13 July 1925.

⁵⁴ "Te Wai Pounamu College", *PR*, 21 February 1912. The college opened in 1909, and it is known that five girls left with Rev. Fraer in 1913.

⁵⁵ "Education", *Hawera & Normanby Star*, 26 August 1902.

⁵⁶ Tucker, 77.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ James Beattie, "Environmental Anxiety in New Zealand, 1850-1920: Settlers, Climate, Conservation, Health, Environment" (PhD diss., University of Otago, 2004), 77-78. Julius L. Wilson, "Rise and Decline of the Tuberculosis Sanatorium," *American Review of Respiratory Disease* 98, no. 3 (1968): 515.

behalf, and championed the place as one big sanatorium.⁵⁹ This is surprising, given low sunshine hours, moisture laden air, and obvious dampness during winter, not to mention the predominance of peat bogs and swamps. Nevertheless, extravagant claims were made based on the island's temperate climate, and constant sea breezes ranging from pleasant to "very healthy and bracing" during warmer months.⁶⁰ In 1886, one satisfied visitor found it "pre-eminently healthy", perhaps one of the healthiest places in the world. In evidence, he cited a low incidence of disease and low child mortality rates. The Māori population was increasing, and their settlements abounded with healthy children, quite the reverse of New Zealand, and surely testimony to the salubrity of the climate. As a resort for invalids, and for "those requiring a general renovation", he was convinced that, "as a sanatorium Chatham Island is *par excellence* the place".⁶¹

These flattering assertions were in keeping with theories of medical geography at that time. Practitioners drew connections between environment and disease, with "findings" derived from aspects of landscape, climate, vital statistics, and mortality rates.⁶² Optimists attested to the island's healing power, speaking of "new life in the air about the place", and benefits to mind, body, and spirit.⁶³ Sigley attributed this to living so close to the ocean. "From anywhere on the island", he wrote, "the sea board can quickly be reached, enabling one to look on the ever-changing face of the sea, and inhale life-giving ozone from its restless waters".⁶⁴ Understood as a cleansing agent, ozone was believed to exist in its most potent form at the seaside.

Projecting an image of perpetual youth, island farmer Charles Wishart was perhaps the boldest claimant. In 1907, he suggested the simple outdoor lifestyle and healthy climate kept sickness at bay, hence, people remained young in bodily vigour and spirit well into old age. Former missionary Johannes Engst was a case in point; having lived 50 years on Chatham Island, he was still "hale and hearty" at 90, and his physical strength was legendary. At 82, army pensioner Denis Murphy was still digging potatoes, "with all the ardour and enthusiasm of a stripling", whilst Richard Rayner continued in his many official roles; after over 40 years of service, the seventy-eight-year-old still rode great distances.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ "The Chatham Islands", *AG*, 13 July 1910.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, *WH*, 2 December 1873.

⁶¹ "The Chatham Islands", *HBH*, 18 September 1886.

⁶² Beattie, 55, 73.

⁶³ Joseph Robert Sigley, c. 1904, "Some Impressions of Chatham Island", Ref. Z.Ms SIG, CCLA; "Chatham Islands", *AS*, 25 March 1933.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ "The Simple Life Materialised", *PR*, 9 July 1907.

There is some evidence of people travelling to the Chathams for the good of their health. Frances Chatwin was in need of a healthy break, and Dr Walter Alexander signed on as doctor in 1922 for the benefit of his own health.⁶⁶ Suffering from heart disease, he was remembered as the doctor who filled out his own death certificate.⁶⁷ But the Chathams were not the health-giving paradise some portrayed. Those who struggled to acclimatise left less positive accounts. By 1864, the damp nature of some New Zealand settlements was already recognised as problematic and “depressing”, and blamed for higher incidences of rheumatism, pulmonary and throat infections.⁶⁸ This water-laden island was far from exempt. The winter of 1907 was particularly cold and wet, and a local correspondent was prompted to describe the impact. He found conditions different to anything experienced in New Zealand, as this was,

a raw, damp, penetrating cold that finds out the “rheumatically” joints, the sciatica nerve, and even the faulty tooth. The damp has an unpleasant way of insinuating itself into the houses. Boots left on the floor of your bedroom for a few days will be found covered with blue mould when next you pick them up; matches in a box on the mantelpiece in the kitchen where there is always a fire will sometimes refuse to strike; while articles, especially those of iron, in unused rooms, feel cold and clammy to the touch. I suppose the “salt sea air” has much to do with this.⁶⁹

Location, seasonal variation, and length of residence no doubt influenced these divergent responses. Drier sandy areas with less mud were perceived more positively, however, and those with a valid opinion agreed the place was generally unsuited to pulmonary complaints and rheumatism.⁷⁰ But much obviously depended on the individual constitution; what was good for one did not always suit another. This was the experience of Frederick and Marion Gascoyne. They brought all their household finery to the residency at Waitangi in 1891, little suspecting the ravages of a damp climate. Moths and mould invaded the carpets, silverware quickly turned black, and the notes of the piano grew muffled or silent.⁷¹ Frederick, who usually kept good health, took months to acclimatise to island conditions, and his health remained poor during his six-

⁶⁶ “Community Life in the Chathams: Social Days of Fifty Years Ago”.

⁶⁷ “The Chathams”, *PR*, 1 March 1923.

⁶⁸ Beattie, 44, 70.

⁶⁹ “Chatham Islands”, *WA*, 17 June 1907.

⁷⁰ “Chatham Islands”, *ibid.*; “The Chatham Islands”, *WH*, 2 December 1873; ““Halfway to Nowhere - a Flying Visit to the Roaring Forties,” 1950s. 4:17

⁷¹ Miller, Constance, fl 1992. History of the Gascoyne Family: MS-Papers-4549, ATL. Silverware tarnished due to a reaction with the hydrogen sulphite given off by peat.

year term.⁷² He blamed the damp climate, and maremare, a type of influenza peculiar to the islands.⁷³

Marion had the opposite experience. Diagnosed with Addison's disease, she was given no hope of recovery. Once on the island, she steadily improved in health and vigour, "enjoying the quiet life and spending much time in the open air, keeping busy in the farmyard and garden, and riding about".⁷⁴ Certainly, with such a well-ventilated lifestyle, the Chatham Islanders were free from the diseases prevalent in the mainland's industrial cities. Chudleigh thought Rayner was wise in choosing not to go to New Zealand, "to toy with New Zealand bacteria", and to keep to the ones he was familiar with.⁷⁵ However, as Lyne explained, mainland bacteria found its own way there.

Lyne was generally impressed by the standard of health on the island. Life on Wharekauri Station was "exposed" at best, and men were often soaked to the skin when cold, heavy showers swept through the clears. Yet remarkably, they seldom suffered a cold or sore throat. The only truly bothersome complaint came by ship.⁷⁶ Whenever one arrived, up to half the population was struck down with maremare. This caused violent colds and flu-like symptoms, serious enough to cause intense misery for at least four days, and annoying milder symptoms for up to two weeks. Recurrent infections provided little immunity, and occasionally maremare took the elderly and infirm, especially among Māori.⁷⁷

Sickness occurred regardless of proximity to the arriving vessel, and Lyne found it absurd that a little ship dropping anchor 25 miles away could start people sneezing and blowing noses. He later learned of similar epidemics on remote islands throughout the world.⁷⁸ Residents of St Kilda, the westernmost islands of the Outer Hebrides of Scotland, suffered an "identical disorder", known as the "boat-cold" or "stranger sickness".⁷⁹ In 1885, a St Kilda church minister offered a common-sense answer, suggesting that because the islanders only breathed "the pure air" of the local atmosphere, they were more susceptible to the ills of people arriving from other places,

⁷² Major F. J. W. Gascoyne, *Soldiering in New Zealand* (London: T. J. S. Guilford and Company, Ltd., 1916), 144. Gascoyne was RM from 1891 to 1897.

⁷³ Various spellings are used, including murri-murri and mari-mari.

⁷⁴ Miller.

⁷⁵ Chudleigh, 439.

⁷⁶ Robert Nunez Lyne, *The Chathams in the 1880's* (Bath, England: Self-published, 1948), 22.

⁷⁷ "Chatham Islands Notes", *Star*, 15 August 1910; "Chatham Islands", *WA*, 3 May 1907.

⁷⁸ Lyne, 22. Other islands similarly affected were Norfolk Island, Tristan de Cuhna, and the Faroe Islands.

⁷⁹ R. A. Chudleigh, "The "'Strangers' Cold'," *British Medical Journal* 2, no. 1340 (1886): 484. The author was Edward Chudleigh's brother.

where the air was unclean. Later, germ theories and medical research would confirm that those living in extreme isolation had very low immune systems.⁸⁰

Other curious facts emerged about the Chatham Island version of “boat cold”. It seems all residents were susceptible, regardless of length of residence, and more noteworthy,

in order to be infected, a person need not know that a ship has come, indeed, the mere appearance of murri-murri [sic] is proof to the inhabitants even at distant parts of the island ... that a ship is in port, inasmuch that, on no other evidence, people have actually ridden off to Waitangi to fetch their letters. There is a hill, whence one can see across the island into Waitangi Bay; and people are wont to climb this hill, and scan the bay for a ship, on no other evidence than the occurrence of murri-murri.⁸¹

At times, almost the entire population was laid low, some with acute symptoms, and others left devoid of energy. On at least one occasion maremare upset plans for an important community event. In January 1891, islanders intended to celebrate the centennial of the island’s “discovery”, and resolved to “have a good time”.⁸² A regatta, horse races, and “popular sports” were planned, but maremare arrived with the ship, affecting every pocket of population. Māori suffered a number of deaths, and festivities were abandoned.⁸³ As late as 1958, Dr Tucker noted the same “wave” of colds and influenza circulating the island whenever a ship arrived.⁸⁴

Community carers

Like colonial settlers elsewhere in New Zealand, islanders often felt vulnerable in the absence of a qualified “medical man”, but when the need arose, “some capital amateur doctors” came to the fore.⁸⁵ During his term, Major Gascoyne regarded himself as “principal doctor” in the Waitangi area, and rated his skills quite highly.⁸⁶ In 1895, he wrote, “There was much sickness on the island during the latter part of this year, chiefly

⁸⁰ R. Hutchinson, *St Kilda: A People's History* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2014). <https://books.google.co.nz/>.

⁸¹ Chudleigh, 484. Dieffenbach noted the effects of maremare on the island population in 1840.

⁸² “Chatham Islands”, *NZH*, 23 April 1894; “A Second Visit to Chatham Islands”, *PR*, 17 February 1892.

⁸³ “A Second Visit to Chatham Islands”, *PR*, 17 February 1892. Henry O. Forbes, “The Chatham Islands and Their Story,” in *The Fortnightly Review*, Vol. 59 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1893), 670.

<https://books.google.co.nz/>. Some events were held a few months later.

⁸⁴ Tucker, 81.

⁸⁵ Joanne Bishop, ““The First Line of Defence”: Domestic Healthcare in Colonial New Zealand, 1850s-1920s,” *Health and History* 16, no. 2 (2014): 6. “Chatham Islands”, *Star*, 14 January 1896.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

among the children. I was kept pretty busy acting as doctor, and was happily successful in pulling the little ones through.”⁸⁷ Gascoyne knew his limitations, however, and when H.M.S. *Lizard* arrived the following year, he went on board at once to request the ship’s doctor attend to residents in urgent need. As the local correspondent pointed out, “these occasions are the only opportunities we have of seeing a medical man from one year’s end to another”; it would be “a great boon” if when navy ships called, these services could be officially sanctioned.⁸⁸ No such authority was forthcoming.

Another trusted amateur doctor was Kate Beamish, who ran the Travellers’ Rest Hotel and store at Te One, in partnership with her husband.⁸⁹ Kate followed in the footsteps of her mother Marion Danvers, acting as nurse and midwife for over 40 years. Reputedly, Kate had even wider skills, and was known for “incalculable assistance to all and sundry in sickness and trouble of all sorts”.⁹⁰ Considered “part of the institution”, she was sorely missed when she left the island in 1908.⁹¹

Throughout the island, care was delivered in a variety of ways. In the north-east, Elizabeth Shand adopted a motherly role, advising and helping mothers, and providing a family atmosphere for young settlers like Edward Chudleigh and Thomas Ritchie (figure 27). She also nursed the sick and dying, without discrimination.⁹² William Baucke remembered his mother’s exertions during the 1850s, going out in all weathers to deliver babies. She provided food and arranged shelter for elderly Moriori, and nursed anyone in need.⁹³ Nellie Grennell ran the family farm of Rapanui, and always ensured there was enough extra for those in need. She nursed through influenza epidemics, and served as a midwife, riding a horse well-beyond her sixties.⁹⁴

⁸⁷ Gascoyne, 161. The first recorded epidemic of chicken-pox was reported about this time. This caused widespread sickness and several deaths.

⁸⁸ “Chatham Islands”, *NZH*, 16 April 1897.

⁸⁹ “Chatham Islands”, *Star*, 14 January 1896. Catherine Beamish (nee Fougere) was 14 years old when she arrived in 1866, along with her brothers and mother, Marion Danvers. Her step-father, Captain Boswell Danvers, was part of the military guard, and the family arrived with the first Hauhau prisoners. She later became Mrs Palmer. The Travellers’ Rest was later moved to Waitangi and still exists today.

⁹⁰ “Chatham Islands”, *WA*, 22 December 1908; “Chatham Islands”, *Star*, 14 January 1896.

⁹¹ “Chatham Islands”, *WA*, 22 December 1908.

⁹² Frederick Hunt, *Twenty-Five Years’ Experience in New Zealand and the Chatham Islands: An Autobiography*, 2nd ed., ed. (Wellington: William Lyon, 1866), 60.

⁹³ “Where the White Man Treads”, *NZH*, 14 September 1912; H. D. Skinner, *The Morioris*, ed. William Baucke (Honolulu, Hawaii: The Museum, 1928), 39. At that time the Baucke family lived at Maipito, close to Waitangi.

⁹⁴ Aika.



Figure 27: Edward Chudleigh, on left, spending time with the Shand family at Te Whakuru, c. 1868. Ref: 1/2-076005-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

In outlying settlements, some took responsibility for treating injuries and minor ailments. In the 1930s, Robert Paynter of Kaingaroa was better known as “the doctor”. Children rushed to him for repairs after “those daily accidents kids have”, and it is likely fishermen had more serious injuries attended to.⁹⁵ Chudleigh held the doctoring role at Wharekauri, and events there in 1890 highlight the difficulties and heartbreak when more serious illness occurred. When a young farm worker became critically ill, *Kahu* was at the islands. Chudleigh was determined to bring the ship to Taupeka, to transport Gordon Jacobs to hospital in Christchurch.⁹⁶ Riders delivered a series of urgent

⁹⁵ Chatham Islands chapters by David Holmes, 2000-068-28, Papers relating to the Chatham Islands, Kate Te Miria Wills Johnson Collection, ATL.

⁹⁶ Chudleigh, 371.

messages to its various ports of call, without success, and Chudleigh was infuriated. He refused to transport Gordon to Whangaroa, for the shipping agent's convenience. No vehicle could cross in winter, and with the patient in a pitiable condition, carriage by stretcher over 14 miles of rough ground was beyond contemplation.⁹⁷ After a torturous wait of 12 days, Gordon was finally taken aboard *Kahu* at Taupeka. A fine young man by Chudleigh's reckoning, he died before reaching hospital.

Deaths under these circumstances were difficult to come to terms with, and especially so when the casualty was young.⁹⁸ Deeply regretted, Gordon's passing sparked discussion over medical needs. As it stood, people often rode from place to place in desperation, seeking suitable medicine in the home of another, and seldom found it.⁹⁹ At the very least, a well-equipped communal medicine chest was urgently required. Five years later, in 1895, the government supplied a range of basic medications, to be held and dispensed by the schoolmaster at Te One. Sold at cost price, this system was used for a number of years.¹⁰⁰ Mete recalled the "Nannies" at Owenga, dispensing proprietary medicines as well as traditional remedies made from local flora and fauna. Even as a small child, she realised the importance of listening to their advice.¹⁰¹

Pitt Islander Ernest Langdale-Hunt believed mainlanders had "no idea" how problems of isolation played out in medical emergencies.¹⁰² In 1903, his father grew seriously ill, and the doctor sent him to hospital in Christchurch. Left alone with two young children, his mother waited anxiously for news. She received no word of her husband when the steamer next called at the island, at least two months later. The ship's captain suggested the family come aboard and travel to Lyttelton; the alternative was waiting up to four months until the ship's next visit.¹⁰³ Ernest believes this must have been a stressful ordeal for his mother, travelling with a baby and toddler, and having never left the Chathams before. But knowing was infinitely better than wondering and fearing the worst. Albert was found making a slow recovery, after having a massive hydatid cyst removed from his liver. The family stayed in New Zealand

⁹⁷ Ibid., 372.

⁹⁸ Ibid. "Chatham Island News", *Star*, 18 July 1890.

⁹⁹ "Chatham Island News", *Star*, 18 July 1890.

¹⁰⁰ "Chatham Islands", *Star*, 14 January 1896; Sigley, 2.

¹⁰¹ Mete, 80, 121-22. Mete does not say whether these remedies derived from Moriori or Māori.

¹⁰² Ernest Langdale-Hunt, *The Last Entail Male* (Christchurch, N.Z.: E. Langdale-Hunt, 1985), 57.

¹⁰³ Time lapses are not given, but based on shipping schedules, and depending on time of year the ship would call at Pitt island every two or four months.

until he was fit to return, and were forever thankful Albert reached hospital in time.¹⁰⁴ Many other Chatham Islanders were not so fortunate.

Professional carers

New Zealand's early doctors were "a heterogenous lot", with varying degrees of integrity and ability, and the Chathams seemed to have more than its share of "quacks" and poor performers.¹⁰⁵ In the microcosm of the Chathams lives were open to scrutiny, and the doctor was not exempt. Dr Samuel Cooper arrived about 1872. A man of "unprepossessing appearance", he lived a solitary life in a remote bush house.¹⁰⁶ While his medical skills were questionable, his propensity for alcohol was beyond doubt. He delivered Katherine Pattisson's first child in 1873, but the "drunken, argumentative ghoul" was never invited back.¹⁰⁷ These were strong words from Katherine, but she was not alone in her opinion, as most island women preferred to trust in local midwives.¹⁰⁸ Katherine had also engaged Marion Danvers, a midwife and nurse, who arrived from Waitangi several days before the birth. Danvers stayed over a month, and unlike Cooper, was "worth her weight in gold".¹⁰⁹ The doctor's ineptitude and bad behaviour continued to shock, and one principal Māori land owner petitioned government to have him removed, without success. Cooper stayed at the Chathams upsetting people for almost 20 years.¹¹⁰

Still, when he left in 1885, islanders began to think any doctor was better than none. This deficit was most acutely felt when mourning deaths, especially for those whose lives might have been saved by a simple operation, or skilled treatment of wounds.¹¹¹ It was especially upsetting when deaths occurred without any diagnosis, as if somehow, knowing would make the loss easier to bear. People were always left wondering about more positive outcomes had medical help been available.¹¹² A local correspondent appealed to the wider world, and the plea was answered in the form of

¹⁰⁴ Langdale-Hunt, 56-57.

¹⁰⁵ L. K. Gluckman, *Medical History of New Zealand Prior to 1860*, Tangiwai: A Medical History of 19th New Zealand (Auckland: L. Gluckman, 1976), 261. Some were graduates of universities and royal colleges, others had served an apprenticeship.

¹⁰⁶ Lyne, 9. Some sources speak of Cooper's wife and child.

¹⁰⁷ Pattisson, 26 August, and 4 October 1873; 27 May and 7 November 1876.

¹⁰⁸ Jacqueline Oliver, *Isles of Chance: A Robinson-Clough Family History* (Nelson: J Oliver, 2004), 264.

¹⁰⁹ Katherine Jane Pattisson, 1849-1881: Diary Transcript. Ref: MSDL-0806, ATL, October 4, 1873, 13 August 1873.

¹¹⁰ "Chatham Islands", *Daily Southern Cross*, 26 September 1876

¹¹¹ "Chatham Islands", *NZH*, 15 July 1895; "Trip to the Chathams", *PBH*, 16 May 1903.

¹¹² Chudleigh, 371. "Chatham Island News", *Star*, 18 July 1890.

“Dr Sheridan”, a “duly qualified medical man holding the degree of Bachelor of Medicine, University of London”, who arrived in 1889. Some thought this was too good to be true, and they were right. Clearly, even in the remote Chatham Islands, people were too astute to be taken in by a charlatan. Although the game was up, Sheridan made no hasty departure, and remained for several years.¹¹³ The quiet life of the island, far from the glare of mainstream society, clearly suited these shadowy figures.¹¹⁴

From 1904, the government’s solution was to appoint a Medical Officer who also served as stipendiary magistrate.¹¹⁵ The longest serving was Dr George Homer Gibson. In 1912, an outbreak of measles took islanders by surprise. “Being so far out of the world”, they expected to escape “those sort of things”, and measles had stayed away for over 40 years.¹¹⁶ Consequently, “very few had had it before, and the disease took full advantage, hardly missing a house”. In some households, everyone was “attacked at once”, and the doctor was kept very busy.¹¹⁷ Gibson also attended patients on Pitt Island. Before the advent of the motorised fishing launch, medical attention was often unattainable there, and a patient “either lived or was buried”.¹¹⁸ In November 1918, a virulent strain of influenza reached the island.¹¹⁹ Over the following months, Gibson frequently travelled 100 miles without taking a rest. He regularly crossed Te Whanga Lagoon, and covered rough tracks and bog-land at all hours of the day and night, and worked the point of exhaustion.¹²⁰ He relinquished the post the following year, after 14 years of service, but his replacement did not stay long. On arrival, the newcomer immediately booked a return passage on the same steamer he came on.¹²¹

This was hardly a comfortable or desirable practice. Regardless of patient needs or good intentions, urgency had little currency in the Chathams. In September 1923, Dr Edward Pohau Ellison attended a woman at Mairangi who fell from her horse. A

¹¹³ “New Steamers for the Union Company”, *NZH*, 17 February, 1891; “The Otago Daily Times”, *ODT*, 13 February 1891. Sheridan escaped indictment for fraud and was heavily fined for breaching the Medical Practitioners Act. It seems he had at least some useful medical knowledge.

¹¹⁴ “Chatham Islands”, *Star*, 18 April 1889.

¹¹⁵ In July 1901, the New Zealand Public Health Act was extended to the Chatham Islands, and in 1902 the newly established Chatham Island County was declared a health district

¹¹⁶ No less than 50 Moriori and Māori succumbed to measles between 1866 to 1868, while the penal colony operated at the island.

¹¹⁷ “Chatham Islands Items”, *PR*, 9 March 1912.

¹¹⁸ Langdale-Hunt, 26.

¹¹⁹ The timing of this virulent strain coincides with the deadly second wave of the influenza pandemic known as the “Spanish Flu”. At 19.3 deaths per 1000, the death rate was particularly high within the island’s Māori population. See Geoffrey Rice, *Black November: The 1918 Influenza Pandemic*, University of Canterbury Press, 2005.

¹²⁰ “The Chatham Islands,” *Star*, 14 January 1919. Gibson was 62 years old at this time, and his efforts were described as “herculean”.

¹²¹ “Chatham Islands Notes”, *PR*, 5 April 1920.

neighbour found her the previous day with an obviously broken leg, but had little choice but to drag her some distance home on a large sack. He then rode 26 miles to fetch the doctor, arriving in Waitangi late in the evening. Ellison set off at daybreak, checking on a patient with asthma on the way. After making the injured woman as comfortable as possible, he rode a further four miles to Wharekauri Station to stay the night. He checked on the patient the following day, and arrived back in Waitangi that evening. This incident entailed over a day's wait for the patient, a two-day journey for the doctor, only two patients seen, and little to be done if urgent medical attention was required elsewhere. As his tenure drew to a close, Ellison gave a welcome series of lectures on first aid. The first was appropriately titled, "What to do before the doctor arrives".¹²² In the Chathams, that usually meant quite some time.¹²³

Conclusion

Histories, such as *Forget Them Not Our Past*, highlight the lives of some past island women whose lives were not entirely ruled by house and kitchen. These are second-hand accounts, selective and palatable memories designed to celebrate "success" in the face of understated adversity. What goes unsaid is that these women's lives were ruled by the choices of men, dominated by household and family responsibility, and constrained by poor mobility. Some took what opportunities presented to seize the rewards of their "frontier" lifestyle, and in this way, exerted at least some control over their lives.¹²⁴ But theirs was the "attenuated" freedom spoken of by historian Lynette Russell, not 'freedom' as women understand it today, rather, this was a series of "strategic choices".¹²⁵ There is silence too over levels of domestic abuse and violence. A doctors' wife resident in the Chathams in the 1950s claimed there was a "high instance of wife beating, but as the policeman was hardly ever notified officially there was little he could do about it".¹²⁶ Arbuckle believes family violence went unreported "out of

¹²² "Chatham Island Notes", *PR*, 22 April 1925. Ellison served as Medical Officer from 1923 to 1925.

¹²³ The Chathams were without a hospital until 1927, when a two-roomed cottage hospital was built. Initially manned by a doctor and nurse from the Canterbury Health Board, the building was later expanded to four rooms, plus housing. From 1949, the Sisters of the Order of the Society of Mary ran the unit, under the oversight of the resident Medical Officer, and North Canterbury Hospital Board.

¹²⁴ Lynette Russell, "Roving Mariners Australian Aboriginal Whalers and Sealers in the Southern Oceans, 1790-1870," (Albany: Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 102, 08. Russell is referring to colonial encounters between sealers and whalers, and indigenous women in Australia, but the same principals may be applied to women's relationships in a range of colonial settings.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 102, 18, 25, 27.

¹²⁶ Elaine Margaret Grundy, *Who'd Marry a Doctor? A Chatham Islands Casebook* (Christchurch: Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1968), 42, 80.

some misguided sense of loyalty”, however, it seems more likely silence was motivated by fear.

For Val Mete, constrained to a small area for the first 12 years of her life, the horse extended her world-view, if only by 14 miles. Caroline Gascoyne was of an age and era to question the restraints of polite Victorian society; for her, the horse transformed a dreary life into an adventure. The stories told to her family suggest the island experience was enriching, empowering, and transformative, but being young and privileged, this was more about self-indulgence than survival. There were few leisured ladies on Chatham Island, and others travelled by horseback to improve their lives in more essential ways. The horse could carry a woman away from drudgery, tension, and fears, and into a space of “power with”, rather than “power over”, in both a physical and emotional sense. Achieving freedom through mobility, and caring for themselves in this way, enabled women to care for others, to take an active role in the welfare of the community, and to provide support for one another.

Given the island’s poor economy, it was all-but impossible to satisfy the needs of everyone, but some deficiencies were less easily dealt with than others. Isolation, and a lack of adequate medical care, sometimes brought tragic consequences. This took a heavy emotional toll on the small population. Issues over health and medical care stimulated discussion and generated concern, and in this aspect too, to coin Mete’s phrase, islanders were “all in the same boat”.¹²⁷ Bonds forged and sustained through matters of life and death crossed race, class, and gender borders, and produced practical forms of care. But as the final chapter shows, despite implied abundance and self-sufficiency, and the community’s resolve to care, some periods and events challenged the capacity to look after their own.

¹²⁷ Mete, 108.

Chapter 8: Insularity, Identity and Psyche

Interactions between the Chatham Islands and New Zealand depended on connectivity, through transport systems carrying people and goods, and by modern means of transmitting information.¹ Distance clearly had an adverse effect on the distribution of ideas, technology, and a range of human exchanges.² This chapter attends to the harsher material realities of living over 500 miles from the mainland, to show how distance and isolation shaped the island psyche and sense of belonging to New Zealand. Reference to government reveals inconsistencies in dealing with the Chathams, but uncertainty, and its effects on the Chatham mindset, are the primary focus. Tracing the evolution of insider/outsider status and perspectives, it further uncovers the origins of insular traits, the attributes described by Michael King as the “negative face of Chatham’s culture”.³ I foreground situations and events which tested and strained relations between the Chathams and New Zealand, to argue that intractable insularity sometimes worked to the islander’s disadvantage. At the same time, by demonstrating the fluidity of insider/outsider boundaries, I argue the islanders were far from immune to wider events and allegiances.

“Insular” derives from the Latin *insula*, which means “island”, so by definition, the Chatham Islanders are insular people, with a narrow view of the world. Insular also denotes those removed from and disinterested in other cultures, the insider mentality of “rootedness” described by human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan. Given the islanders’ slow rhythms of life and suspicion of outside authority, Tuan’s theory proves useful in analysing an evolving sense of identity. “Rootedness” is defined as being completely at home in an unselfconscious way, an unreflective state of being. At its extremes, this condition weakens curiosity about the wider world, and suppresses worries about the future; time becomes less relevant.⁴ These were some of the Chatham Islander attributes criticised by outsiders.

A previous chapter addressed the uneven effects of time-space compression, to show that over time, the Chatham Islanders felt even more distant from mainland New Zealanders. Adopting the geographical principal of “distance decay”, this chapter

¹ L. S. Pun-Cheng, Distance Decay, The International Encyclopaedia of Geography, 2016, 1-5.

² J. Douglas Eldridge and John Paul Jones III, “Warped Space: A Geography of Distance Decay,” *Professional Geographer* 4, no. 43 (1991): 500.

³ Michael King, *A Land Apart: The Chatham Islands of New Zealand* (Auckland: Random Century, 1990), 8.

⁴ Yi Fu Tuan, “Rootedness Versus Sense of Place,” *Landscape* 24 (1980): 5.

examines the opposite effects of time-space compression. Acting on the premise that integration lessens as objects get further apart, this concept demonstrates that the greater the time, money, or effort required to reach a place adversely affects trade, communication, and cultural connections.⁵ According to King and others, distance and isolation were the principal reasons the Chatham Islanders came to regard themselves as a distinct people, and their islands as an entirely separate region, with its own history and way of life.⁶ Journalist Frank Simpson was more direct, claiming island circumstances were sufficient to “breed the characteristics of an exile people”.⁷

Chatham Islanders were often portrayed as self-sufficient, comfortably situated in a land of plenty, with abundant fish, game, and farm produce. The testimony of residents and visitors supports this image, but in reality, islanders were no strangers to material privation. Distance, isolation, and hardship put many of the comforts and conveniences of modern society beyond their reach, a fact they were fully aware of, and some used the term “left out in the cold” to express their feelings in this situation. While some outsiders understood the islanders’ predicament, many more viewed the island lifestyle as lacking and disadvantaged, and sometimes laboured that point. Islanders generally accepted this as elemental to living in their chosen place. Those who endured ceased to worry about things not easily changed, and grew resigned to the fact that outsiders had little respect for their way of life.

Placidly forgotten

Feelings of abandonment and injustice permeated islander relationships with government and its representatives. Interest and investment in the islands are best described as minimal. According to Alison Quentin-Baxter, successive governments recognised that arrangements suiting mainland New Zealand did not always fit the Chatham Islands. There was the same basic need for services, but because the population remained small, the islands lacked the “critical mass” required to support these services on a cost-effective basis.⁸

⁵ Bob McKercher and Judit Zoltan, “Tourist Flows and Spatial Behavior,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Tourism*, ed. Alan A. Lew, C. Michael Hall, and Allan M. Williams (33-44: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 39. <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ezproxy.otago.ac.nz/doi/book/10.1002/9781118474648>.

⁶ King, 7-8. Preface to Department of Industries and Commerce, “Economic Survey of the Chatham Islands,” (1972).

⁷ Frank A. Simpson, *Chatham Exiles: Yesterday and Today at the Chatham Islands* (Wellington [N.Z.]: Reed, 1950), 140.

⁸ Alison Quentin-Baxter, “The Problems of Islands,” *Island Development and its Future* (Waitangi, Chatham Islands, 1995, 428, accessed November 4, 2018, https://www.victoria.ac.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/838764/Quentin-Baxter.pdf).

Chatham Islanders could hardly be classed as wealthy. High shipping costs drastically reduced spending power, and few made good profits from the land.⁹ By the turn of the twentieth century, environmental and climatic challenges were well known. In 1897, one pessimistic visitor claimed the island had gone backwards, and now stood, “alone, isolated, living upon itself”. Money was scarce, and most business was conducted by barter. An “old settler” agreed they were no more progressive than 30 years earlier.¹⁰ King cites the inability to pay rates to the newly-established county council in 1925 as an indication of ongoing poverty.¹¹ Many families lived at a subsistence level, and had little experience of a cash economy.¹² As Arbuckle pointed out, there was no “favourable internal economic and social structure”.¹³

The Chathams were seldom mentioned in parliament, and any debate over the peoples’ well-being and progress was often littered with derision. In 1881, parliament was reminded that islanders had no representation, nor any means of establishing self-government. Some argued that distance and small population were no justification to deny the rights of New Zealand citizenship, but to no avail.¹⁴ Successive governments may have regretted the lack of status endured by Pākehā islanders, but this was considered inevitable. Māori were barely considered at all.

Attempts to join the Chathams with a New Zealand electorate were thwarted until 1924, due to lack of interest, implied distance, and the prospect of irregular and unpleasant travel.¹⁵ In 1925, the Chatham Islands County Council was established, and “small and simple local affairs” were the order of the day.¹⁶ One journalist envisioned few improvements, as distance and inaccessibility prevented the new MP from keeping in close contact with this isolated outpost of New Zealand. As it was, the group rarely received public attention or consideration, and was “placidly forgotten by most of the

⁹ “Chatham Island”, *EP*, 20 July 1901. In 1950, freight and wharf charges added at least 12.5% to all goods received.

¹⁰ “The Chatham Islands”, *TIM*, 5 March 1897. This was not always the image projected, as shown by laudatory efforts to encourage closer settlement.

¹¹ Prior to the establishment of a county council, the Wharf Committee generated revenue by charging on all imports and exports passing over the wharf. The County Council was forced to revert to this system in 1936, due to non-payment of land rates, and the Chatham Islands County Council Empowering Bill ratified this in method in 1936.

¹² King, 7.

¹³ Gerald A. Arbuckle, *The Chatham Islands in Perspective - a Socio-Economic Review* (Wellington: Hicks Smith, 1971), 11.

¹⁴ Chamberlain, 13 September 1881, *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 38, 1881, 544.

¹⁵ The Chathams became part of the Lyttelton electorate, represented by James McCombs, and the Western Māori electorate, represented by Sir Māui Pōmare.

¹⁶ “Chatham Island Notes”, *PR*, 27 May 1924.

Dominion".¹⁷ To the average New Zealander, the Chatham Islands were out of sight and out of mind.

Insularity

In the Chathams, the perceived indifference of central government generated a sense of detachment from New Zealand society, an apparent apathy verging at times on mutual disinterest and disrespect.¹⁸ A distinctive culture evolved in response to island conditions, and the people no longer readily identified themselves with New Zealand.¹⁹ Appearing outwardly relaxed and happy, islanders showed a distinct preference for managing their own affairs. As King observed in 1990, this manifested in "casualness about dress, appearance and behaviour; a distinct lack of enthusiasm for filling in forms and setting up committees to satisfy New Zealand bureaucracies; an unwillingness to cooperate with a succession of magistrates and constables; a suspicion of strangers and instant 'experts'".²⁰

From the late nineteenth century, outsiders noted that island life was narrow and parochial.²¹ In 1908, Skey encountered these "decidedly insular characteristics". Incidents which would barely be noticed in a larger community were debated intensely, and issues could become all-engrossing to the point of obsession.²² These myopic tendencies were regarded as an inevitable consequence of being part of a small community, "shut off" from communication, or as one local correspondent ruefully claimed, having little news, "except of the very ordinary kind".²³ However, most islanders did not even recognize these traits, "let alone worry about them".²⁴ It was the "outsiders", the "representatives of bureaucracy", magistrates, constables, doctors and teachers, "who tended to complain about the islander's obstinacy and inefficiency", the symptoms of insularity.²⁵

How are insiders and outsiders defined in this context? As geographer Edward Relph explains, the outsider looks upon a place as a traveller views a town from a distance, as an observer, and not a participant. On the inside, people are surrounded by

¹⁷ "The Chatham Islands", *NZH*, 23 October 1923.

¹⁸ Arbuckle, ix-x.

¹⁹ Quentin-Baxter, 428.

²⁰ King, 7.

²¹ "The Chatham Islands", *AG*, 13 July 1910.

²² "Chatham Islanders", *PR*, 22 May 1908. Skey, director of the Magnetic Observatory in Christchurch, was carrying out a survey of the island at that time.

²³ "Chatham Islands", *WA*, 13 October 1906; "The Chatham Islands", *AG*, 13 July 1910.

²⁴ King, 72.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

and part of that place. They experience it, because, “to be inside a place is to belong to and identify with it, and the more profoundly inside ... the stronger is this identity with the place”.²⁶ The essence of place emanates in geographies, landscapes, and homes, but is most powerfully manifested by experiencing an “inside” that is distinct from an “outside”. Above all else, this “simple but basic dualism” is what sets places apart in space, “and defines a particular system of physical features, activities and meanings”.²⁷ More often than not, these inner meanings are withheld from the outsider; the outsider is usually aware of this, but at the same time, also recognises their own incapacity to participate in those meanings.²⁸ Hence, place is likely experienced as a setting only, little more than a background to activities engaged in.²⁹

This insider/outsider dualism is a feature of most isolated places. Geographer Robert Hay studied community formations on Banks Peninsula, and defined bonds with place created through social connections and length of residence, concrete attachments established over time. Evolution of belonging is firmly tied to the accrual of local knowledge and experience of that environment. When insider status is achieved, by birth or through long-term residence, a person feels like a native of that place, and derives a sense of security from that status.³⁰ This is recognised as a common feature of isolated communities, where people take pride in being multi-skilled and self-sufficient, masters of harsh conditions and circumstances.³¹

By nature of geography and environment then, are more strongly defined boundaries between insiders and outsiders to be expected in the Chathams? Scholars worldwide note common characteristics among island-dwellers, and some use the term “islandness” to describe this state.³² A shared sense of islandness resonates “through time and across space”, and according to Phillip Conkling, this “metaphysical sensation” transcends “the particulars of local island culture”.³³ Scholars recognise two primary origins, firstly, the “heightened experience” accompanying physical isolation, and secondly, the nature of island boundaries. These are often frightening and impassable

²⁶ E. C. Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976), 49.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid. 51

²⁹ 52

³⁰ Robert B. Hay, “A Rooted Sense of Place in Cross-Cultural Perspective,” *The Canadian Geographer* 42, no. 3 (1998): 248-49. Hay studied community life on Banks Peninsula.

³¹ Ibid., 246. Simpson, 135. Quentin-Baxter, 428.

³² Philip Conkling, “On Islanders and Islandness,” *Geographical Review* 97, no. 2 (2007): 192.

³³ Ibid., 191, 92. Conkling is a major contributor to the Island Institute's annual publication *Island Journal*, which celebrates the island and coastal communities of Maine through stories, art, and poetry. Articles highlight the innumerable facets of “islandness” shared by islanders around the world.

bodies of water, that “amplify a sense of a place that is closer to the natural world”.³⁴ Conkling believes a sense of islandness sustains islanders, even in the face of severe economic pressures; that it is “absorbed” through the “obstinate and tenacious hold of island communities”.³⁵ However, the visitor is not excluded from these heightened sensations, which are often experienced as a powerful and “instantaneous recognition” of being on an island.³⁶

Social anthropologist, Anthony Cohen, studied community life on Whalsay, a small island in the Shetland group. The island sits 210 kilometres north of the Scottish mainland, and is separated from Shetland’s main island by a half-hour ferry ride. Cohen identified self-confident insularity as a characteristic of islander’ consciousness, part of “being peripheral”.³⁷ Any breach of insularity, such as intervention by external authorities, is considered to impugn “the integrity of local expertise and knowledge”. The disparaging comments of “outsiders” are seen as an attack on islander identity and values, and results in what Cohen describes as, “residual and perpetual anger”. Whalsay residents regard themselves as masters of harsh conditions and circumstances, and this response is based on the frustrated recognition that, nevertheless, local “expertise, skills and opinions” are “willfully trampled upon by incompetent outsiders — bureaucrats and politicians — who have no experience of the local situation but who wield decisive power over it”.³⁸ Resentment is seldom openly expressed as “a generalized loathing of the outsider”, but emerges in conversation, where the topic often gravitates to the “administrative and political ineptitude” of external agencies, who wield power and made decisions on the islanders’ behalf.³⁹

There are many such examples in the Chatham Islands, where, far-removed from centres of power, people developed distinctive ways of managing life’s challenges. But as Tuan argues, rootedness is not necessarily a condition to be celebrated. When “wrapped up in hum drum daily life”, people become less “aware” of others, and less open to wider opinion. When measured in “small satisfactions”, days are less likely to bring any high moment of beauty and perfection.⁴⁰ In this “unreflective state of being”,

³⁴ Ibid., 191.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Anthony P. Cohen, “Blockade: A Case Study of Local Consciousness in an Extra-Local Event,” in *Belonging: Identity and Social Organisation in British Rural Cultures*, ed. Anthony P. Cohen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 305.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Tuan, 6.

the “human personality merges with its milieu”.⁴¹ When faced with criticism, Chatham Islander indifference and resentment often manifested in unapologetic irreverence toward government and its appointees. Even those who considered themselves fine upstanding citizens, such as Edward Chudleigh, J.P., resisted change and progress, albeit lawfully. Chudleigh, and a small, more-affluent group of settlers, developed their own processes of government on the island, and brooked no interference. Their manipulations and assumed control were undemocratic, but this group was powerful and influential, nevertheless.

In 1892, one bemused correspondent pondered the absence of a franchise. The people were surely entitled to some say in the government of the country, but the islanders’ resistance to progress was puzzling. He broached the issue with several “wise heads”, but was quickly reprimanded with, “Don’t think of such a thing. Why, we shall all be taxed to death. Every known tax in force in New Zealand will be thrust upon us here.”⁴² The enquirer never quite grasped “the force of this argument, as nineteen-twentieths of us have scarcely got enough to jingle on a tombstone”.⁴³ Some RMs attempted to curb the dominance of self-appointed island rulers, those described by Florance as “the enemies of progression”.⁴⁴ In the early 1900s, he enlisted several members of parliament, to help promote local government, parliamentary representation, and closer settlement.

George Laurensen, MP for Lyttelton, and Tommy Taylor, MP for Christchurch, both visited the Chathams. In 1901, Laurensen gave a public address in Waitangi, pointing out, that under current conditions, Chatham Islanders were “practically only adherents” of the colony, rather than participants in its progress. The audience was unmoved by this politicking, and his “gifted” oratory earned no more than a polite vote of thanks. In the same article, the local correspondent effectively negated any need for change. Claiming the majority view, he commended the excellent way local affairs were independently managed, a system with which “all the settlers are perfectly satisfied”.⁴⁵ This leaves little doubt that Laurensen was wasting his breath.

Reports such as these represent the views of only a small proportion of island residents, an elite group with a dominant voice, and the means to make it heard. The

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² “Chatham Islands News”, *Star*, 26 April 1892.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Florance to Hon. F. Addington, Commanding H.M.S. *Phoebe*, Wellington, 14 April 1900, Court House Records, Waitangi, Chatham Islands, quoted in Arbuckle, 9.

⁴⁵ “Chatham Islands”, *Star*, 22 March 1901.

image projected to the New Zealand media perpetuated an idealised view of island life. In an interview with the *Christchurch Press* in 1907, island farmer Charles Wishart spoke contentedly of his,

happy land far, far away ... a little country that is free from rates and taxes ... we have no representation in Parliament, and have no political luxuries to pay for. In spite of that we rub along very comfortably ... the simple life agrees with us immensely over there ... absolutely no poverty. How could there be when nature supplies food so abundantly!⁴⁶

The island's natural resources did provide an abundance of food, but Chatham Islanders did have other needs and wants. Few enjoyed being deprived of imported commodities. At times, six months or more elapsed between shipping calls, often reducing residents to "a state of siege-like embarrassment".⁴⁷ Rather than issue a lengthy list of complaints, local correspondents often resorted to wit and humour, to make light of these precarious periods. Entertaining accounts of alcohol shortages serve as examples. In 1870, one complained, "even our hotel bars have been hermetically closed, and thirsty toppers have become involuntary members of a temperance society".⁴⁸ Again in 1876, hotelkeepers were forced to dispense, "quite homoeopathic doses, and then soon combined this with hydropathy; under the "combined system ... those few bottles were made to do service" for an astonishing length of time.⁴⁹ Light-hearted accounts of this type appear as a common mechanism in coping and resigning oneself to the deprivations of daily life.

However, these humorous reports did little to promote the islanders' best interests. By ignoring the more serious implications of irregular shipping, attention was diverted from more genuine material needs. However, local correspondents were capable of relaying frustration over perceived neglect. The same witty correspondent wrote,

We waited patiently, well, so we did, for it was no use waiting any other way. But numerous and loud were the murmurings about the slowness of the Government, and the commercial world in not troubling their heads about us. The stock of provisions on these Islands has been very scant for some time past, some people being out of flour, some have no tea, others

⁴⁶ "Chatham Islands", *Taranaki Daily News*, 20 July 1907.

⁴⁷ "News of the Omaha", *PR*, 14 August 1886.

⁴⁸ "Chatham Islands", *EP*, 13 September 1870.

⁴⁹ "Chatham Islands", *ST*, 18 October 1876.

no sugar, and some none of either. Some of us have for nearly two months past, been living on mutton and potatoes.⁵⁰

Certainly, when a ship arrived with flour and other commodities, there was great rejoicing in many households.⁵¹ As the Reverend Bowen was rowed ashore in 1874, the new arrivals were eagerly hailed by those on shore. Any sense of self-importance was fleeting, however, as it seemed flour had been in short supply for some weeks, and the people were anxious to know whether supplies had arrived with the ship.⁵² Not only foodstuffs were keenly awaited. Rayner spoke of one occasion when no ship called for over eight months. Boots were worn out, and people were forced “to go back to primitive times and wear sheepskin sandals [sic]”. Garwood was horrified to learn of these periodic deprivations, and through the press, insisted the government improve communication with this “part and parcel” of the colony, “so that our fellow-colonists ... may not be ostracised as they now are”.⁵³

From time to time, the mainland media drew attention to the Chatham Islanders’ predicament. During an “annexation craze” in 1885, when government aspired to rule distant islands such as Samoa and Fiji, some argued against it, claiming government should concentrate on existing possessions closer to home. After all, what had been done to promote the prosperity, happiness, and comfort on the “neglected dependency” of the Chatham Islands? This group was literally “left out in the cold”. New Zealanders seemed to know little about them, and apparently, couldn’t “care less”. Islanders were poor and politically powerless, and doubtless saw few advantages in their connection with New Zealand.⁵⁴ Islander comments in 1893 support this assumption. A local correspondent complained, “although part of the colony of New Zealand, we feel sadly like a poor relation, left out in the cold and neglected by our richer sister”.⁵⁵

This view was certainly shared by Arthur Peverill, who visited on behalf of the Canterbury Education Board in 1918. Peverill was shocked by the lack of infrastructure and administration; no county council, roads board, or franchise, not to mention intolerable shipping arrangements. Peverill sent a damning report to the Minister of Internal Affairs, and ensured details were published in the *Christchurch Press*. This

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ “News of the Omaha”, *PR*, 14 August 1886.

⁵² Reverend Croasdaile Bowen, *Account of a visit to the Chatham Islands*, 1874, Pattison, Hoel Thornthwaite, Papers, MS-Papers-9665-2, ATL.

⁵³ “The Chatham Islands”, *AMBA*, 25 January 1887.

⁵⁴ “A Neglected Dependency”, *EP*, 26 January 1885.

⁵⁵ “Chatham Islands”, *NZH*, 11 February 1893. Also see “Chatham Islands”, *WA*, 13 October 1906.

forthright method elicited a response. The Minister commissioned a report and sought guidelines for setting up a county council. The feedback of “an island official” sums up the unwillingness to adopt mainland systems, and more importantly, to invite rates and taxes. It was wartime, so in many regards the cautious response is understandable. It read:

Owing to the large number of residents that have gone to the war, and the unsettled state of affairs on the Island at present, it would be very inadvisable to try and put the Counties Act in force, as I know most of the people would be very hostile if such an action were taken. It would be much better to let matters stand over till after the war, as the way things are now it would be impossible to carry on the Council if it were brought into being.⁵⁶

As it transpired, Government efforts to establish a democratic public body at the Chathams were thwarted until 1925. In that year, Reverend Canter aired his views on the lack of progress, describing a “slow moving and reactionary” community, where practically everyone was “a law unto himself”.⁵⁷

Disrespect of the law was nothing new on the island, especially when these were instigated by self-appointed island leaders like Chudleigh. Reaction to a dog tax introduced in 1889 is a case in point. To discourage nuisance dogs, several “leading settlers” petitioned government to impose a levy.⁵⁸ As principal landowners, Māori resented the lack of consultation, and were openly defiant. Efforts to enforce the tax “afforded a fund of conversation and a little amusement”, both locally and in the New Zealand press. When attempting to arrest defaulters, Constable Rayner was forced to retreat on several occasions, and enforcement was generally regarded as a joke.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, outside observers struggled to make sense of the government’s harsh approach, especially when the Commissioner of Police and a small artillery force were sent to the Chathams. As one journalist cynically noted, if costs were to be offset, “there must be more dogs in the Chatham Islands than there are either sheep or inhabitants”, and in any case, few dog owners could afford to pay.⁶⁰ Another estimated the costs of the exercise would be four times the revenue gathered.⁶¹

⁵⁶ “The Chatham Islands”, *PR*, 7 September 1918.

⁵⁷ “Life on the Chatham Islands”, *LCP*, 17 September 1925.

⁵⁸ At 5s per head, this was a considerable sum.

⁵⁹ “Chatham Islands”, *PR*, 20 July 1889.

⁶⁰ “The Cruise of the Hinemoa”, *SR*, 30 September 1889.

⁶¹ “Six Weeks at the Chathams”, *PR*, 29 March 1890.

This was no laughing matter to Chudleigh, one of the prime movers of the tax. In January 1891, he disgustedly noted, “the arm of the law failed and became as wax before the fire”.⁶² Some settlers were nervous over Māori reactions, but most Europeans had little to fear. Māori remained friendly and hospitable throughout this episode, and engaged fully in the island’s social activities.⁶³ In fact, it appears Pākehā distanced themselves from the hard-line views of the elitist group. Hotel-keeper Henry Odman was asked to supply “prison rations” to defaulters held in Waitangi goal. He refused to provide anything less than “three square meals a day”, prepared to the same standard expected by all his guests.⁶⁴ The food was so good, that by the end of their term, prisoners had to be “gently expelled”.⁶⁵ The whole business proved far too costly for government, and in March 1891, the Chathams were exempted from the tax.⁶⁶

Even earlier reports suggest the island community were generally indifferent toward officialdom. In 1877, rumours were afloat of an impending visit by the Governor of New Zealand, but the prospect raised little excitement. A local correspondent claimed, “our islanders know little of dignitaries and care less”, but nevertheless, he believed the governor would be made welcome.⁶⁷ This strange juxtaposition of patriotism and irreverence for the crown was typical of island attitudes.

Decisions made by government appointees were often openly flouted. In March 1901, the RM refused to allow passengers from New Zealand to disembark from the steamer, owing to a fresh outbreak of bubonic plague in Australia. They all landed regardless.⁶⁸ In 1925, in a similar incident, Dr Gibson, Health Officer and RM, imposed quarantine restrictions on a Māori child with suspected whooping cough. The girl’s parents were incensed, as she had been certified clear of the complaint. Matters escalated when Gibson quarantined contacts during the voyage, but some passengers immediately went ashore in open defiance. An interested and mocking crowd assembled on the beach, loudly voicing their opinions, and awaiting the outcome. Gibson was forced to renege after an eight-hour standoff.⁶⁹

⁶² E. R. Chudleigh, *Diary of E.R. Chudleigh, 1862-1921: Chatham Islands*, ed. Eva Carlisle Richards (Christchurch: Simpson and Williams, 1950), 373.

⁶³ “Six Weeks at the Chathams”, *PR*, 29 March 1890.

⁶⁴ “How the Maoris Frustrated the Dog Tax”, *EP*, 13 July 1901.

⁶⁵ “A Preference for Gaol”, *PBH*, 29 January 1890.

⁶⁶ “The Otago Daily Times”, *ODT*, 14 March 1891.

⁶⁷ “Chatham Islands”, *HBH*, 22 January 1877. The rumours were unfounded.

⁶⁸ “Chatham Islands”, *Star*, 22 March 1901.

⁶⁹ News of the Day, *PR*, 11 July 1910.

Through incidents such as these, the Chatham Islands garnered a reputation for lawlessness and resistance to authority. Support for officialdom was far from guaranteed, and the Chatham Islander, as a separate entity from the mainland New Zealander, was steadily taking shape. This progression can be attributed to distance decay. Distance from markets, and a prolonged lack of positive interaction with New Zealand, created a sense of detachment, both physical and psychological. A useful analogy is magnetic force; the further the nail is moved from the magnet, the less pull-effect the magnet has on the nail. As early as 1901, Grove was surprised to find islanders talking “just as though Chatham and Pitt Islands did not form a part of New Zealand. When anyone or anything goes to Lyttelton it is said they have gone to New Zealand. The islanders will have it that Chatham is Chatham and not New Zealand, as though the island was a foreign land”.⁷⁰

The depression years: “All had plenty of nothing”

During the economic depression of the 1930s, circumstances tested the government’s sense of obligation to the islands, and at the same time, confirmed islander’ assumptions about their tenuous position as New Zealand citizens. On the eve of the depression, most islanders were poor in a monetary sense, but to the outside observer, life appeared “easy”, with no unemployment, and plenty of fish.⁷¹ Nonetheless, few islanders were unaffected by falling prices for wool and stock, and a declining market for fish.⁷² Holmes remembered the worst years were from 1931 to 1936. What little money people had was spent on basic stores and clothing. Still, he believed they were better off there than many on the mainland, as the bulk of food came direct from farms. No one starved, but there were certainly no luxuries.

Imported goods were not only unaffordable, much of the time these were simply not on the shelves. With no guarantee of a return cargo, the regular shipping company virtually cut services, and supplies were unattainable for months on end. When the ship did run, freight charges were prohibitive; a 50lb bag of flour cost £1, the equivalent of four to six days wages for the average worker.⁷³ It cost less to freight goods to China or Britain.⁷⁴ “Things were bad”, Holmes wrote, but in typical, stoic island fashion, he

⁷⁰ “Down at the Chathams”, *ST*, 25 July 1901.

⁷¹ “Chatham Islands”, *EP*, 15 March 1930.

⁷² “Chatham Islands”, *PR*, 8 September 1932.

⁷³ Holmes, “Story of the Depression”.

⁷⁴ Isla Hanby (formerly Wilson), “Early Chathams Experiences”, interview by Eileen Cook, 1981, http://www.ngataonga.org.nz/collections/catalogue/catalogue-item?record_id=215240; “At the

projects an image of self-sufficiency and plenty in the face of adversity, claiming, “all survived, but frugally ... all had plenty of nothing”.⁷⁵ People shared resources and helped each other, and paid with the “Arohanui cheque”, meaning much love and gratitude.⁷⁶ This may be true, but Holmes’ rosy perceptions are based on the experiences of one relatively comfortably situated. Considering conditions 14 miles across the island, his claim “all were happy” is a step too far. Others paint a very different picture of life at Owenga during this time.

The rise and fall of the fishing village of Owenga not only highlights contrasting standards of living during the depression, but also serves as a case study of other life issues uncovered by this thesis. This includes isolation, distance decay, hardship, poor infrastructure, and a problematic economy, and more importantly, their impact on changing social structures. In the early 1900s, activities at Owenga were based primarily around the sheep station of that name, but from 1910, the area developed as a fishermen’s village. Essentially, this was the first settlement to evolve in response to an industry other than farming, and which concentrated a larger population within one small area. Given the depressed state of farming, fishing promised an alternative source of income for many islanders, and for most, this was their first venture into a cash economy. Both Māori and Pākehā engaged in fishing, and the industry also attracted a number of outsiders.⁷⁷

Social change was inevitable. Migrants to the village were separated from wider family support, and no longer had ready access to land. The lack of infrastructure, along with the vagaries of the industry itself, brought additional stresses. Initially, the fishing company purchased a factory site from the owners of Owenga Station, along with 20 acres of grazing land for company horses. The company wished to provide reasonable conditions for fishermen and staff, and believed each family should have enough land to build a suitable home, establish a garden, and keep a cow and horse, so as to be self sufficient.⁷⁸ However, offers to purchase extra land were repeatedly refused.⁷⁹ As the population grew, living conditions were far from ideal (figures 28 and 29).

Chatham Islands”, n.d., enclosure in “Newspaper Cuttings – shipping, MS-Papers-0434-59/4, Burt, William Beverland Collection, ATL.

⁷⁵ Holmes, “Story of the Depression”.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Keryn Nielsen-Doesburg, ““Insiders and Outsiders”: A Social History of Fishing in the Chatham Islands Circa 1910 to 1975 Focussing on the Crayfish Boom” (MA Thesis, Massey University, 2009), 4.

⁷⁸ Marine Department Annual Report for 1919-19, *AJHR*, H.-15, 1919, 11; “The Chatham Islands”, *PR*, 7 September 1918.

⁷⁹ Young, 51-52. This highlights the problems caused by some absentee land owners who had little knowledge of the island’s social conditions.



Figure 28: The fishermen's camp at Owenga c. 1919, before it became overcrowded. Private Collection of Bryce Shirtcliffe.



Figure 29: Wash day at the creek near Owenga fishermen's camp, n.d. Private collection of Bryce Shirtcliffe.

Large families were forced into temporary shacks, in squalid conditions with no privacy, on part of the horse paddock.⁸⁰ A regular income was far from guaranteed. Rough weather and heavy seas meant frequent periods of lost production, and fishermen were often left idle. Without land, it became increasingly difficult to meet daily requirements. Concerned about health issues in the fishermen's "camp", in 1922, Maxwell Young, a visiting marine scientist, urged government to acquire land under the Land for Settlements Act.⁸¹ In 1929, 97 acres finally came under government ownership. Subdivided into 21 allotments, these were offered to married fishermen for cash or on deferred payment.⁸²

Ernest Guest witnessed boom times in the village of Owenga.⁸³ By 1930, the population stood at around 120, there was a small Anglican church, and over £250 had been raised toward a recreation hall. The future of the village seemed assured, until events in the outside world cast a shadow. Up until that time, Chatham Islanders paid no taxes, and received no welfare benefits, but from October 1930, they were required to contribute to an unemployment relief fund.⁸⁴ All males over 20 years of age were liable for 30 shillings a year, paid in quarterly instalments.⁸⁵ Defaulters were liable to a fine of £5, and accrued debts were recoverable by the Crown through the magistrate's court.⁸⁶

Guest recalled mixed reactions to the tax. Most contributed "willingly enough", while others saw no need for such precautions, and scoffed at those who paid.⁸⁷ But times grew leaner as the market for fish declined, and most fishermen failed to meet their tax commitment. Ila Wilson, wife of the Anglican vicar, was amused by the men's casual disregard for the processes of law. They had no money to pay the tax, or the resulting fines, but when sentenced to imprisonment, this was not viewed too seriously. The fishermen enjoyed the camaraderie of riding together to the court in Waitangi, and

⁸⁰ Maxwell W. Young, "The Fishing Industry in the Chatham Islands," *New Zealand Journal of Science and Technology* 6 (1923): 51-52. Ernest Matthias Guest, Letter, Owenga, Chatham Islands, to Jack and Lilian Guest, MS-Papers-3877, ATL.

⁸¹ Young, 53

⁸² Report on the Land for Settlements Act of 1925, *AJHR*, C.-5, 1999, 1.

⁸³ Ernest Mathias Guest, Letter, Owenga, Chatham Islands 21 Aug 1938, to Jack and Lilian Guest, MS-Papers-3877, ATL. Guest went to the Chathams to visit Joseph John Guest, a cousin who taught at Te One School from 1906-1912. Ernest, a builder by trade, stayed on and took an active role in local affairs. He built a government school and teachers residence at Owenga in 1920, and later opened a store there. A keen photographer, he was also postmaster at Owenga for a time.

⁸⁴ Guest.

⁸⁵ The Unemployment Act, *New Zealand Statutes*, 1930, Section 6, 51, and Section 10, 52.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, Section 6, 51. In 1931 an additional "Emergency Unemployment Charge", at a flat rate of 1.25% on all income, was added to the £1 poll tax.

⁸⁷ Guest.

had “a nice day”, safe in the knowledge the island had no prison large enough to hold them, and the cost of sending them to New Zealand was prohibitive.⁸⁸

The carefree mood was short-lived. In April 1932, the Owenga fishing factory closed, with no indication of when it might reopen.⁸⁹ Fishermen continued to get basic food supplies through the company on credit, expecting to repay the debt when the industry revived.⁹⁰ This did not happen, and when further credit was denied, some families were soon in genuine distress.⁹¹ Relief work was petitioned from the Government, in keeping with the policy for unemployment relief on the mainland, but “imagine our dismay”, wrote Guest, “when word came that owing to the difficulties of administration etc. etc., no relief funds could or would be made available for the Chathams”.⁹² Guest, and other concerned residents, contacted MP James McCombs for clarification. They were shocked to learn, that in December 1932, permanent residents of the Chatham Islands were excluded from financial support under the Unemployment Act of 1930, due to problems in administering the system from a distance.⁹³ An order in council had sealed the fishermen’s fate. The only ones who received any financial assistance were New Zealand men who went to the Chathams in search of work, “and they soon left”. Residents who contributed to the scheme petitioned government for a refund, and the incident seemed closed when refunds were received about 12 months later, albeit reluctantly. The hardships of the depression, along with the government response, was an unsettling experience for many. The prospect of being excluded from social security benefits was a cause of concern for struggling and elderly islanders.⁹⁴

The government was well-aware of the islanders’ plight. In September 1932, the government steamer *Matai* was sent with over 80 tons of provisions, the islands’ first supplies in over five months. McCombs was on board, and reported the adverse conditions on the island; plenty of meat and cheese, but little else.⁹⁵ Walter Toy, a Lyttelton shipping agent, drew attention to hardships at Owenga. Referring to the absence of relief, he said it was “a case of nothing for nothing”. Families were barely scraping out an existence, and those who took up sections in 1929 could no longer meet the repayments. Flour was virtually unknown, and most families lived on potatoes, fish,

⁸⁸ Hanby, 14:34.

⁸⁹ Guest.

⁹⁰ Hanby.

⁹¹ “The Chatham Islands”, *PR*, 12 December 1932.

⁹² Guest.

⁹³ The Finance Act 1932 (No. 2), 1932, *New Zealand Statutes*, Section 22, 316.

⁹⁴ Guest.

⁹⁵ “Chatham Islands”, *PR*, 8 September 1932. A cheese factory was operating at that time.

and mutton. Men worked for two to three days in return for one carcase. They were “not whining about their hardships”, but struggling on in grim circumstances. Clothing was giving out, with no means of replacing it. Toy was especially concerned for the innocent victims of the situation, and appealed for donations of food and clothing, for the sake of the children.⁹⁶

Visiting and resident clergy also made the situation known. In early 1933, the Reverend John Wilson appealed to Canterbury residents for donations of toys, as Christmas had “come and gone like all the other days last year ... without any little luxuries” for island children. He realised his efforts might not be appreciated, and might even bring him under attack, as the islanders were very independent.⁹⁷ Later that year, the Reverend A. H. Barnett found “deplorable” cases of hardship, and took steps to alert the Prime Minister.⁹⁸ All-the-while, the press downplayed the seriousness of the situation. An island tobacco store had reportedly burned down, and locals were reduced to smoking seaweed, tea-tree, or “anything else that would serve as a “smoke”.⁹⁹ This particular hardship was deemed more newsworthy than the lack of necessities, with some newspapers implying tobacco was the most important cargo on board *Matai*.

From 1934, conditions for the island’s fishermen and farmers began to improve. Fishing resumed intermittently, but shore-based operations could no longer compete with trawlers such as *South Sea*.¹⁰⁰ In 1936, a fire in the freezing chambers at the Owenga factory proved the death knell for the industry there, as the company was unwilling to reinvest in the facilities.¹⁰¹ Over half the fishermen were forced to disperse, some to New Zealand, some to Kaingaroa, and a few to intermittent fishing with the trawler companies.¹⁰² By 1936, there were only 42 people remaining at Owenga.

The demise of the shore-based fishing industry, and the absence of organised unemployment schemes, were blamed for a thirty-three percent decrease in population by 1939.¹⁰³ Although figures were disputed, some claimed over 200 people, from an estimated population of 600 in 1930, were forced to leave for New Zealand to engage in paid relief work. This was considered both ludicrous and sad. While the island needed

⁹⁶ “The Chatham Islands”, *PR*, 12 December 1932.

⁹⁷ “Children in The Chatham Islands”, *PR*, 24 January 1933.

⁹⁸ “Fewer Men on Relief Works”, *PR*, 10 October 1933.

⁹⁹ “Smoking Seaweed”, *Stratford Evening Post*, 8 September 1932.

¹⁰⁰ Colin George Dennison, “The Chatham Islands: A Study of Community and Economy in an Isolated Setting (MA Thesis, University of Otago, 1966), 20.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* “Chatham Island Fisheries”, *PR*, 7 December 1937.

¹⁰² Dennison, 151-152.

¹⁰³ These figures are substantiated by the population data collected by Dennison, page 69.

public works, the feasibility of monetary investment was played out in the New Zealand press.¹⁰⁴ Some claimed the fishing industry supported the Chathams during the depression, with trawlers such as *South Sea* sustaining high productivity.¹⁰⁵ However, few local fishermen were employed by New Zealand companies running these operations, and it is evident the demise of shore-based fishing was a significant factor in outward migration.

Holmes believed the Chatham Islanders were better off than mainlanders during the depression, but arguably, with fewer comforts and luxuries at the best of times, islanders had less to lose from the deprivations of that period. In many respects, the depression years were yet another, albeit prolonged period of restraint and subsistence living. Accustomed to deprivation and hardship, the Chatham Islanders prided themselves on self-sufficiency, to the point of bloody-mindedness. Many were opposed to charity. In characteristic fashion, they maintained a cheerful attitude, and seldom complained.¹⁰⁶ All may have “had plenty of nothing”, but there was little to joke about. Not everyone survived the conditions happily, as numbers migrating to New Zealand clearly show.

From 1 April 1939, the Chatham Islanders were once again required to pay a social security tax.¹⁰⁷ That month, J. M. Smith, a Field Superintendent with the Department of Agriculture, was spending time on the island. He noted the new tax was the main topic of conversation. Most accepted this philosophically. With equal quantities of smugness and cynicism, one Māori man assured him, “we don’t mind helping our poor neighbours in New Zealand.” However, Smith could not ignore the fact that there were now more houses on the island than there were people.¹⁰⁸

Fluid bonds

It is evident that at least some Chatham Islanders felt “left out in the cold” in their relationship with mainland New Zealand, but on occasion, actions suggest the people did hold wider allegiances. Being part of a British colony, RMs were eager to hoist the Union

¹⁰⁴ “Chatham Islanders”, *Press*, 4 December 1939.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, and 12 December 1939; Economic Survey, 1972, Part II, Section 6.23.

¹⁰⁶ “Chathams Cheerful”, *EP*, 10 February 1934.

¹⁰⁷ This was levied at 1s in the £.

¹⁰⁸ “Chatham Islands”, *Horowhenua Chronicle*, 21 April 1939.

Jack when appropriate, and especially when ships arrived at Waitangi (figure 30).¹⁰⁹ A flag post always stood in a prominent spot, but the flags themselves did not withstand the conditions for long. Some blew away entirely, while others were ripped to shreds. Government were unwilling to provide a never-ending supply.¹¹⁰ When Bishop Julius first arrived, he was amused to see a pair of pants billowing on the flagpole instead.¹¹¹ In 1891, the incumbent flag was in a shameful state; Julius had never seen the likes, “all rags and streamers”, why, “all the women in the world could not mend it”. Small wonder, he claimed, that Māori at Waitangi showed so little respect for the law.¹¹² Yet, when Premier Seddon visited unexpectedly in 1906, flags appeared out of nowhere, their tattered condition suggesting regular use.¹¹³

The Chatham Islanders were not averse to episodes of patriotic fervour. In 1902, Florance decided to celebrate the coronation of Edward VII in style, to ensure it was remembered as a significant day in island history. Plans were made for a children’s sports meeting and lunch, and a concert and fancy-dress ball in the evening. Organising an event of this scale was a major undertaking. Materials for props and costumes were not easily got. Both Māori and Pākehā prepared for the event with great spirit and enterprise, and festivities were judged an unqualified success. Florance hoped these celebrations were repeated “as cheerfully and whole-heartedly” throughout the Empire. Disturbing news arrived six weeks later. The King had fallen ill, and the coronation postponed. The young people were keen to repeat proceedings on the actual day, but it was decided these premature celebrations would have to suffice.¹¹⁴

Contrast this to an encounter eight years later. In July 1910, a visitor arriving at Pitt Island hailed a man on shore, eager to deliver important news. “Have you heard that the King is dead?”, he shouted, to which the islander replied, “no, have you brought my case of kerosene?” Taken aback by the lack of “surprise and feeling”, the visitor concluded that Chatham Islanders were “almost indifferent to the happenings and doings in the great world outside their ken”.¹¹⁵ This shows little understanding of the Pitt Islander’s

¹⁰⁹ Major F. J. W. Gascoyne, *Soldiering in New Zealand* (London: T. J. S. Guilford and Company, Ltd. , 1916), 143. <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-GasSold-t1-body-d12.html>. “The Chatham Islands”, *Star*, 24 January 1902.

¹¹⁰ “Six Weeks at the Chathams”, *PR*, 29 March 1890.

¹¹¹ “The Premier at the Chathams”, *ODT*, 9 April 1906.

¹¹² “The Chathams”, *SR*, 13 May 1891

¹¹³ “The Premier at the Chathams”.

¹¹⁴ Christina Jefferson, *Premature Coronation Celebrations at the Chathams: With a Short Biography of Robert Stone Florance* (s.l.: s.l.: s.n., 1950), 9, 12.

¹¹⁵ “News of the Day”, *PR*, 11 July 1910.

extreme isolation. Far from the metropole, the practical needs of day to day existence took precedence, and at that moment, kerosene was more important than the King.



Figure 30: Mangoutu House, Waitangi foreshore. The Union Jack is flying on boat day, c. 1893. George Romeril Album, Photographs relating to Chatham Islands, PA1-o-1333-39, Alexander Turnbull Library.

Geographer Edward Relph offers some insights into fluctuating sentiments over place and allegiance. Scholars have described human existence as centred in zones of involvement, loyalty, and belonging. In the realm of the everyday, everything beyond the current zone, this mental space, or “home”, is considered “outside”. However, the boundaries of these zones are malleable, and adjust according to individual interests and intentions. Perceptions of physical and psychological boundaries are blurred accordingly, along with intensity of feeling about “home”; in other words, there are many possible levels of insideness.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Relph, 48- 49.

Patriotism during World War I suggests the Chatham Islanders were anything but indifferent to events beyond their shores. The response was phenomenal, with almost every man volunteering for active service. Some travelled to New Zealand as soon as possible, at their own expense, in the hope of being found fit to serve.¹¹⁷ All in all, the islanders' response was acclaimed as a "fine spirit of patriotism".¹¹⁸ However, tensions flared in 1917, with an edict that no further recruits would be accepted from the islands. Two local farmers had secretly sought a dispensation, on the grounds the islands were depleted of farm labour.¹¹⁹ The Military Appeal Board recognised the "exceptional" nature of island circumstances, and declared the situation acute, but the decision was not well received by island men already in the forces, and those who still hoped to serve.¹²⁰ The perpetrators were subject to a long-standing grudge on the island.¹²¹

Despite obvious patriotism, the Chatham Islanders suffered many forms of outsider criticism, from uninformed comments about lack of land development and roads, to derogatory slurs about the slow pace of life. Some commentators cast them as inappropriate, almost ridiculous in a modern world. For instance, in 1949, one rather scathing journalist concluded with, "such is the primitive life of the Chathams, an easy-going, comfort-less existence, full of good fun and joviality, suspicious of new-comers and their innovations, desiring only to be left alone to live as their ancestors have lived over the past century".¹²² Certainly, from the early twentieth century, islanders had become more guarded in the way they represented their lives to the outside world. Arbuckle studied the social effects of ongoing criticism, and found this response conformed to the experiences of similar groups elsewhere. Small communities which suffered disparagement from a more dominant society tended to retreat, to minimise contact with their detractors. They often become hypersensitive and suspicious, and form a united front to deflect further insults.¹²³

This was the case in the Chathams, where people grew increasingly indignant about negative outsider comments. Some projected an image of island accord, telling reporters "we rub along very comfortably", and "are living very happily ... mutual help

¹¹⁷ Guest.

¹¹⁸ "Chatham Islands", *SR*, 18 July 1916.

¹¹⁹ Guest; "The Plight of the Chathams", *DOM*, 5 April 1917.

¹²⁰ Military Service, *Sun*, 24 March 1917.

¹²¹ Guest.

¹²² "Life Down at the Chathams is Easy BUT Comfortless," *New Zealand Freelance*, 29 June 1949.

¹²³ Arbuckle, 62.

being the governing principal”.¹²⁴ This must be regarded as a defensive response, because naturally, in this small community, people did disagree among themselves, and the population remained geographically segmented.¹²⁵ However, in the face of criticism and insults, islanders were drawn together to present a unified front.¹²⁶ Admittedly, the island lacked infrastructure, and life there was relatively unsophisticated, however, the term “primitive” was deeply resented as an “affront to their human dignity”.¹²⁷

From the late 1940s, with the advent of flying boat services, many islanders viewed increasing contact with the outside world as something of a double-edged sword. This is evident from the response to incoming members of the press. Island leaders, and even the local constable, met reporters coming ashore, to put a case for balanced reporting, and to provide accurate information about island life. They did not curry sympathy from their countrymen, but wished to discourage any further discriminatory reports. They also sought some appreciation of the island’s unique lifestyle, the choices and priorities of a people adapted to a challenging environment; these were the very aspects Pākehā New Zealanders struggled to understand and accept. Chatham Islanders practised and honed this response throughout the twentieth century.

Conclusion

In the early 1970s, the New Zealand government commissioned a survey to investigate the economic prospects of the Chatham Islands. Certain points were clear from the outset. Firstly, although the islands were legally part of New Zealand, distance from the mainland tended to make them an entirely separate region. Secondly, attending to the islands’ future required a comprehensive understanding of the past. Thirdly, indigenous islanders had developed their own distinctive culture, and strongly distinguished themselves from non-indigenous residents, and from mainland New Zealanders. In this context, indigeneity was not determined by race, but by rootedness. “Indigenous” islanders, or “the locals”, were “a blend of the numerous nationalities that first settled the region”.¹²⁸ Thirty-six percent of the population were defined as Māori, and cultural differences existed between that group and those wholly or largely of European

¹²⁴ “The Chathams,” *Taranaki Daily News*, 20 July 1907; “Chatham Island Sheep Trade,” *TIM*, 16 March 1904. These comments were made by Charles Wishart and Edward Chudleigh, substantial landholders who were active on the wharf and shipping committees.

¹²⁵ Arbuckle, 58. “Developing the Chathams”, *North Otago Times*, 13 June 1917.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹²⁸ Economic Survey, 1972, Part III, Section 7:1-3.

extraction. Socially, however, years of isolation, intermarriage, and conflict with mainland culture had melded many differences within the small permanent population. The “non-indigenous” component, termed by locals as “outsiders”, “mainlanders”, or “New Zealanders”, consisted of government and quasi-government personnel stationed on the island, fishermen from elsewhere, and other less-permanent workers.¹²⁹

The evolution of the Chatham Islander can be firmly attributed to distance decay. Governments made little effort on the islanders’ behalf; economic reality determined decision-making. Arguably, exiled is too strong a word to describe the islanders’ condition, but it is fair to say the Chatham Islanders were disregarded, and even ostracised. Until the 1940s, government consistently failed to recognise the exceptional circumstances of island life. Meanwhile, islanders developed coping mechanisms, and a fiercely independent attitude. Outside advice, or “interference”, no matter how well-meaning, was often shunned and resented. At times, a sense of injustice led to outward resistance toward governmental authority.

The condition of rootedness will eventually merge the human personality with its environment, and while this denotes a belonging to place, this is not necessarily an evolution to be celebrated.¹³⁰ As Arbuckle asserts, the culture of a people can hinder or facilitate development.¹³¹ There are dangers in projecting an air of self-sufficiency. This was the habit of more-powerful individuals on Chatham Island, who purported to represent the views of all, and assumed speaking rights. This theme was perpetuated through stoic accounts by long-term residents and local historians. The good-humoured ability to make the best of a bad lot is perhaps commendable, but in this case, not necessarily to the people’s advantage. This was not the self-contained, cohesive, and comfortable unit some chose to portray. At times, wealth and access to resources were markedly uneven, and despite apparent inertia, and the so called “simplicity” of life, this was a complex society in transition. Many, but not all islanders, proved their ability to survive, but perhaps they did not complain enough.

Instead, islander frustration manifested in outward resistance to official “interference”, primarily in the form of tax. Non-compliance sullied relationships with government, and this is borne out by the official stance during the economic depression. As Toy pointed out, it was a case of “nothing for nothing”.¹³² The government’s denial of

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Tuan, 6.

¹³¹ Arbuckle, ix-x.

¹³² “The Chatham Islands”, *PR*, 12 December 1932.

support at that time was a punitive response to present and past non-conformity. Nonetheless, this was the first time that clear and formal distinctions were made between “those usually resident in the Chatham Islands”, and other New Zealanders. In this instance, government effectively dismissed all Chatham Islanders from their realm of responsibility, citing difficulties in managing situations at a distance as the reason for this decision. All Chatham Islanders were officially rendered a separate identity, and truly left “out in the cold”. Although of short duration, this dismissive attitude further reinforced islander’ perceptions of difference, but not in the way intended.

Conclusion

The Chatham Islands remain New Zealand's smallest territorial authority, and the country's most isolated region.¹ The cray fishing boom of the 1960s brought temporary prosperity, but few sustained benefits. Islanders now enjoy at least four shipping calls each month, and flights up to six times a week, but access cannot always be guaranteed. Weather, rather than the clock, still dictates the daily round. The population has remained relatively static, seldom exceeding 800 over the past 170 years. In terms of infrastructure, standards have not always satisfied the outsider, but certain character traits, many shared with island dwellers across the globe, have fitted people to that environment, instilled resilience, and sustained those who chose to stay.

Self-reliance is paramount. Pragmatic common sense reflects core values of inventiveness, resourcefulness, frugality, and stoicism. Self-sufficiency is a matter of pride, and women too gain prestige through masculine qualities of outdoor strength and endurance. Islanders have long memories, and share a sense of history and time, but the collective memory is internalised, and outsiders are seldom privy to oral traditions. Selective silences preserve certain ways of being, beliefs and perceptions which bind that community. For this reason, the joys and sorrows, the achievements and defeats, the inner complexities of this society, are not easily measured by the outsider.

There are other things not easily measured, such as the effects of distance on the islanders' materiality and psyche. Earlier images, designed to encourage settlement, implied the Chathams were close to, and virtually part of mainland New Zealand.² This perhaps clouded mainland perceptions of scale and proximity. However, the difficulties imposed remained the islanders alone. As Tony Ballantyne asserts, in colonial New Zealand, it was mails, people, and news that shaped individual places, and the nation as a whole.³ Rollo Arnold used the analogy of sinews and nerves, to stress the importance of transport networks, institutions and media, and to describe their role in knitting the colony together. This highlights the contrasting realities of the Chatham Islanders, who went without these developments for an extended period of time. Without these

¹ Chatham Islands Economic Profile, Final Report, 2017, 2, accessed November 5, 2018, <http://www.cic.govt.nz/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/MJ-Chatham-Islands-Economic-Profile-Update-November-2017-Final.pdf>.

² Charles Heaphy, *Narrative of a Residence in Various Parts of New Zealand: Together with a Description of the Present State of the Company's Settlements* (London: Smith, Elder, 1842), 110-111.

³ Tony Ballantyne, "On Place, Space and Mobility in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand," *New Zealand Journal of History* 45, no. 1 (2011): 60, 63.

connecting tissues, they felt not only peripheral, but also disembodied from the mainland. Undoubtedly, they seldom felt part of the nation space of New Zealand, and this was a prime factor in shaping the island's singularity.

It is common for island dwellers across the globe to refer to their mainland as though it were another country. With over 500 miles of turbulent ocean between, Chatham Islanders were constantly reminded of being far from "coastal", of standing well apart. There are many other things which shape a sense of place, including history, culture, economy, and environment. Islanders had many barriers to overcome. They continually struggled to find a balance between commercial and personal requirements; the economic realities of sending exports to markets, the essential nature of communication in person and by mail, and the ability to leave and return in a timely manner.

In the era of sailing ships, people understood that nature dominated, and accepted travel plans were at the whim of currents, tides, and storms. The steamship brought higher expectations, followed by disappointment, and the realisation that small vessels used around the New Zealand coast were generally unsuited to that stretch of water. Services even on that scale were seldom economically viable, so there seemed little hope of improvement. Passengers were seldom accommodated well. It was always difficult to reach mutual understandings with government, and to find agreeable solutions over needs and problems. At times, when bonds were tested, it seemed there was nothing between these places but sea. Cultural and psychological boundaries were constructed, along with a mutual sense of betrayal. Yet, links with the mainland were always imperative to the islanders, and islander-instilled boundaries have proved more malleable than attitudes would allow.

For island dwellers, impassable bodies of water create a sense of closeness to the natural world. Water certainly defined the Chathams' community. Although a bounteous provider, the ocean demanded respect, and travel by sea was a source of uncertainty, stress, and fear. Islanders readily shared experiences of the dangers and discomforts of encounters with the sea, yet seldom mentioned struggles with the land. This is surprising, given cohesion was hampered by poor mobility, and this made it difficult to shape community in any regular sense. But in studying the social aspects of island travel, this thesis has shown how in-island mobility actually shaped community, and defined a sense of place. Slow and convoluted journeys were taken to coincide with tides and weather, over paths made and remade in response to natural elements. At the

end of the journey, travellers received a hospitable welcome, and face-to-face contact stimulated a sense of oneness, of belonging to this place with various 'others'.

In the absence of committees and civic organisations, homes served as meeting places, sites of commitment and care; these were the spaces in which people spoke and listened. We can imagine how relationships of trust were formed through conversations at the hearth, how differences were overcome, problems solved, and decisions made. Community was realised and sustained at this very informal level. Hospitality was a mutual expectation, extended to all as a symbol of generosity, loyalty, and interdependence. In this, and in matters of food and healthcare, universal need overcame frictions. Self-reliance was praiseworthy, but helping neighbours in times of sickness and need was vital, otherwise the entire community was effectively put at risk.

The relationship between people and place, I have argued, evolved through the very physical, material existence of daily life, for a people who learned to work in and around the land, and not against it. It is visitor accounts which stress the trials and tribulations of in-island travel, whereas the islanders' relative silence suggests acceptance and resolve. According to soil scientist, Charles Wright, who surveyed the island in 1955, travel was still "exceedingly tedious". However, long-term residents never seemed to complain; it was only younger people and newer arrivals who expressed frustration over conditions, and appeared eager for improvement. Others seemed entirely unconcerned, accepting poor access as a normal feature of life. Wright believed most were so "hardened" to that environment they no longer realised the limitations imposed.⁴ As examiner Eric Pawson noted, the so-called lethargy and inertia criticised by outsiders was likely the islanders' means of "adapting to the exigencies of place", because, "in most respects, island life seems to have required enormous energies!" Others argue that for some, meeting a difficult and challenging environment face to face is an adventure, that pitting the body against the elements actually invigorates the traveller.⁵ There may have been some element of this in the Chathams, but it seems unlikely conditions were regarded as a novelty for long.

I argue instead that people established meaningful relationships with this place in the same way they did with one another, by meeting it face to face, seeing and sensing the land directly. Knowing this place through the senses, islanders were fully cognisant

⁴ A. C. S. Wright, *Soils of Chatham Island (Rekohu)*, edited by New Zealand Department of Scientific and Industrial Research and New Zealand Soil Bureau (Wellington, N.Z.: Dept. of Scientific and Industrial Research, 1959), 9.

⁵ John Urry, "Mobility and Proximity", *Sociology* 36, no. 2 (2002): 261-262.

of its positive and negative attributes. They understood and accepted its idiosyncrasies and moods. They knew how it felt to walk or ride about in this terrain, in good weather and in bad. They knew how it felt to be under a particular sky, when change was coming, and where to take shelter from wind and storm. Like a long-term valued friendship, people came to identify with its ways, make allowances, learned to live with it, felt at home with it. With little infrastructure and technology, a slow pace of life, and a very open environment, there was little to separate islanders from the living natural world. No such bonds of friendship could be formed with the sea.

Despite meaningful connections with this place, in reality, no relationship with place is quite so straightforward. This thesis has exposed contradictions which challenge common tropes of islands, such as “singularity, isolation, dependency and peripherality; perhaps even islandness and insularity”.⁶ For instance, islanders claimed to value their quiet life and isolation, in preference to the artificial pleasures of the mainland, yet they were vexed by the paucity of outside contact, and eager to hear more about the wider world, through shipping calls, radio, and other media. At times, people feared and rejected the opinions of the outside world, with its contrasting lifestyles and values, but they were nevertheless drawn to that world, and welcomed strangers from it. Isolation and environment were credited with keeping people well, but people did become sick, and sometimes it was isolation, the distance from medical care, that took their lives. And while ships inevitably brought the dreaded *maremare*, this did not discourage a large crowd from gathering at Waitangi on boat days, for what was considered the most exciting event in island life. Given these contradictions, I must concur with Michael King’s views on island exceptionalism, which are contradictory in themselves: the Chatham Islands are distant, different, and unique, but nonetheless, they “are and are not part of New Zealand”.⁷

Perhaps the greatest contradiction is shown in the islanders’ response to war. Island men were clearly determined to take an active role, and willingly did so as New Zealanders. The urgency of war overcame faltering allegiances, and traits of difference were temporarily forgotten. Nevertheless, this did not diminish a sense of belonging and identity as Chatham Islanders. But this was not a contradiction, because as Relph

⁶ Elaine Stratford, Godfrey Baldacchino, Elizabeth McMahon, Carol Farbotko, and Andrew Harwood, “Envisioning the Archipelago,” *Island Studies Journal* 6, no. 2 (11, 2011): 114, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.otago.ac.nz/docview/1953325740?accountid=14700>.

⁷ Preface to Michael King, *A Land Apart: The Chatham Islands of New Zealand* (Auckland: Random Century, 1990).

points out, perceptions of place and belonging fluctuate, and loyalties and allegiances contract and expand as circumstance dictates.⁸

While the social sciences can help us analyse aspects of place perception, every environment possesses unique sensory qualities, which are perceived in multitudinous ways. It is all but impossible to produce replicable results, because the complexities and layers of place are as diverse as the complexities and layers of human experience. Yet, we all have experiences of places which implant in our conscience, memory, and heart. We know too that individual responses do not exclude some commonality of experience and expression, that the meaning and value of place also emerges through the collective mind.

This thesis confirms the beliefs of geographer, Ron Johnston, who claimed, “people cannot be understood outside of the context of the place they inhabit, people become who they are in places, and to understand them we must understand the places that made them, and the places they are making”.⁹ These sentiments encapsulate my own understandings of the Chatham Islanders, and my belief that in any valid study of island life, the people cannot be considered apart from environment; to do so would impoverish both people and place.

This study set out to know Chatham Island in the same way islanders did, through sensory encounters with place, albeit in a second-hand way. It shows how sensory history offers another dimension of human experience, to complement and enrich the study of islands and places. There were many elements to challenge mood and emotion on Chatham Island, where nature and environment remained the ‘main act’. As examiner Tom Brooking wrote, in a place as “elemental” as the Chathams, “once the veneer of civilisation is stripped away, weather and wind, bog and sea, become a much more central part of everyday life”. The broad sensory approach used here does justice to this elemental place, and the past lives of the people who made their home there. The sensory approach has proved a valuable tool to encompass those elements alluded to by King; the island’s psychic and historical residue, particular landscape, and sense of timelessness.

At first glance, sensory perception of place might be considered too intangible, too illusive to withstand rigorous academic scrutiny. To overcome reservations, this thesis relies on concepts and theories from a range of disciplines, to anchor, underpin

⁸ Relph, 48- 49.

⁹ R. J. Johnston, “There’s a Place for Us,” *New Zealand Geographer* 44, no. 1 (1988): 9.

and support the sensory sources. This process illuminates the commonality and innateness of the human senses. The terraqueous approach further breaks down boundaries, by collapsing the “land/sea couplet” characterising islands as places “split between two basic forces”.¹⁰ Neither the sensory nor terraqueous were chosen for novel effect, but rather, their natural interplay promotes awareness of place within a wider Pacific environment.

In terms of representation, foregrounding sensory experiences of the everyday potentially stimulates the senses of the reader, allowing them to imagine themselves in that situation, to relate to it, and to better understand how the subject might have felt. The innateness and commonality of the senses makes this possible. Taking this thinking a step further, it might also be said, that engaging with the past in this way potentially transcends time. Sensory history acknowledges that we all share the same senses, and this allows diverse subjects to be studied in new “embodied” ways.¹¹ I would argue then, that through the innateness and commonality of the senses, difference too might be transcended.

Nevertheless, the complexities of place and human nature will always confound the study of place and identity. Ultimately, both defy a formula in writing and explaining, just as the sensory defies a formula in writing and understanding. However, as this thesis had shown, a sensory history approach to environment helps attune to people and place, and permits a more nuanced view of daily life in a specific location. Through the mutuality of the senses, the reader might feel what it was like to live there, and so develop a more embodied understanding of that place. They might then gain a better understanding of the people who made their lives there. In the study of past lives, the sensory affords new and different ways to rescue knowledge “from its privacy”.¹² The same might also apply to the re-knowing of place, but in the final analysis, place has always been better felt than explained.

¹⁰ Bashford, 1; Stratford, Baldacchino, McMahon, Farbotko, and Harwood, 115.

¹¹ Pickles, 262

¹² Greg Denning, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land: Marquesas, 1774-1880* (Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1980), 2.

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