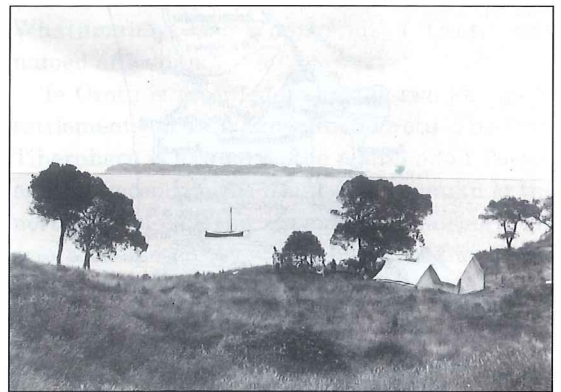




# A Harbour Lost

Patrick Parsons

*Though now only a memory, Napier's Inner Harbour was for centuries of great importance to the Maori people of the area.*



*Head of page: View of Te Whanganui a Orotu, looking south from Maporiki, c. 1907. (Painting: E. Hamilton / Collection of author)*

*Far right: View of Scinde Island (Napier Hill) from below Fryers Road, Poraiti. The area of water is now almost all dry land. (Photo: Alexander Turnbull Library)*

**T**he Whanganui a Orotu, the Napier Inner Harbour, is only a memory now and those who knew it in its pre-quake glory are declining in numbers with each passing year. Prized by the Maori for its shellfish beds since ancient times and, more recently, by the European as a boating and picnicking resort, it is spoken of by both races with a sense of loss.

The Inner Harbour was eight kilometres long and three wide. Te Waiohinganga, the Esk River, discharged into it from the north and the Tutaekuri from the south. The original outlet to the sea was at Keteketerau, north of the Beacons, but continuous blockages caused a new channel to be dug at Ahuriri some time after Captain Cook's visit in the 1770s. The vast expanse of water was dotted with islands both high and low. Most prominent of these were

Roro o Kuri, Te Iho o te Rei (Quarantine Island) and Tapu te Ranga (the Watchman Island). Pre-European fortifications are still visible along the inner shoreline and on the high islands, testifying to long Maori occupation. Urupa (burial grounds) and other wahi tapu are still known to the kaumatua of the area.

Te Whanganui a Orotu was renowned to the Maori as a source of kaimoana. The envy of other tribes, it provided a continuous supply of shellfish, flounders, eels and other fish without the hazards of putting out to sea. The value attached to it by the Maori is illustrated in a lament composed by the Ngati Mahu ancestor Te Whatu for a beloved grandchild; it concludes with the following words:

*Kia horo te haere nga taumata ki Te Poraiti,*



*Ko te kainga tena i pepehatia e o tipuna.  
Te rua te paia ko Te Whanga  
He kainga to te ata  
He kainga ka awatea  
He kainga ka ahiahi, e tama e i.*

*Go quickly to the heights at Te Poraiti  
That is the land in a proverb by your ancestors.  
The storehouse that never closes is Te Whanga,  
A meal in the morning  
A meal at noon  
A meal in the evening, my son.*

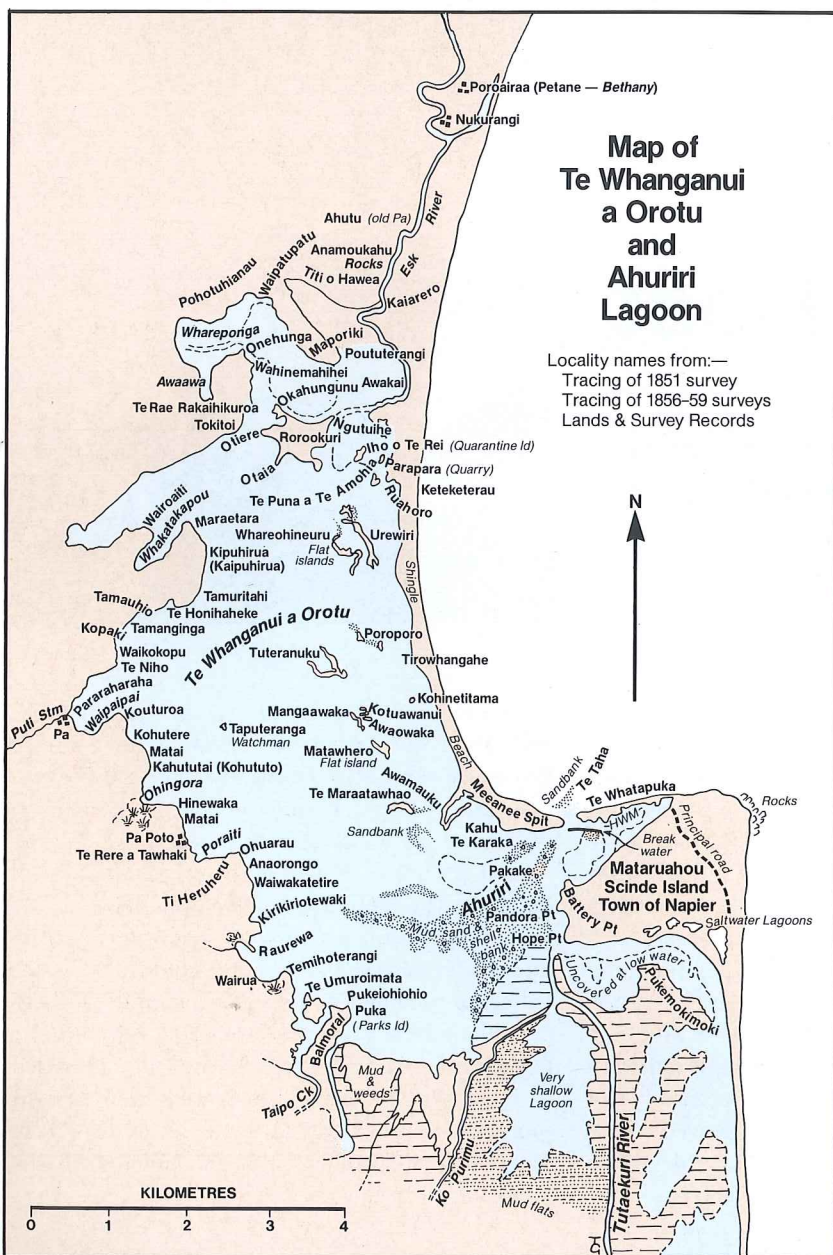
The ancestry of Te Whanganui a Orotu traces back to Tangaroa, god of the ocean, one of the sons of the primal parents, Rangi and Papa.

Tangaroa represents the origin of all fish and also controls the tides. He adopted the name Tangaroa a Tai when he was appointed poutiriao or guardian of the ocean. Genealogies survive linking Tangaroa to Pania of the reef, who is commemorated in sculpture and song at Napier. Pania belonged to the sea people and could only come ashore at night. At sunset each day she swam to Mataruahou or Scinde Island, near Hukarere, came ashore and concealed herself in a flax grove beside a fresh-water spring. One evening Karitoki, a fine young chief from a neighbouring pa, was passing the spring and pausing to slake his thirst he saw the reflection of the beautiful sea maiden in the water. So they met and each evening Pania joined her lover on shore, and each morning she abandoned him at dawn to return to her people. In time a son was born to Karitoki and Pania and was called Moremore, because he had no hair. Fearing that he might lose his son to the sea people, Karitoki called on his tohunga to help him keep his wife and son permanently by his side. The tohunga instructed Karitoki to place cooked food on them while they slept to ensure they would never return to the sea, but the plan went awry and Pania and Moremore disappeared into the sea, never to return.

Moremore was turned into a taniwha who patrolled the waters between Hukarere and Ahuriri, serving the inhabitants of Te Whanganui a Orotu as a kaitiaki or guardian. He appears in various guises sometimes as a shark, sometimes an octopus or a log, warning his people of impending danger while they are gathering kaimoana.

Two ancient tribes in particular are associated with Te Whanganui a Orotu. The earlier of the two is Ngati Whatumamoia who descend from Mahu Tapoanui. The other tribe is Ngati Awa who descend from Awanuiarangi, son of Toi Kairakau. These two tribes are regarded as the tangatawhenua or original inhabitants of Te Whanga. Wiramina Ngahuka spoke of these ancestors in the Omaha hearing of 1889. "The descendants of Toi and Whatumamoia were divided into tribes and did not live together. Ngati Mahu Tapoanui lived in this district. Mahu Tapoanui was the very beginning of our people, a taniwha or god."

Authorities are divided on the origins of the great explorer ancestor Mahu Tapoanui. Elsdon Best records him as a descendant of Toi Kairakau. Genealogies surviving in the Hawkes Bay region show him as a descendant of Tangaroa. Hukanui Watene, an elder from





Right: The southern reaches of Te Whanganui a Orotu from Barracks Hill, Napier, 1898. (Painting: M. Wills/Collection of author)



Mahu's home territory of Waikaremoana last century, gives him as a descendant of Paikea. Mahu is not recorded as having lived at Heretaunga. His strongest associations are at Lake Waikaremoana where he lived at Te Pa o Mahu and at Mahia Peninsula where he kept a residence called Parinui a Te Kohu. Hukanui Watene spoke of Mahu in the Waikaremoana hearing of 1916. "Mahu Tapoanui was before Kahungunu's time. He had his kainga at sea and he was brought ashore by other ancestors. He arrived on shore at Whakaki (north of Wairoa). He had a raupo patch at Whakaki. At Wairoa he had shark and pipis and the places are called Pipi a Mahu and Maunga a Mahu. He proceeded to Omahu in Heretaunga, hence the name."

Several place names testify to Mahu's journey to Heretaunga. Parimahu near Blackhead Beach was the place where he turned back while looking for his brother-in-law, Taewa a Rangi, a noted tohunga. Taewa was landed at Waimarama by the second *Takitimu* canoe to establish a whare wananga at Maungawharau. The present-day Omahu Marae takes its name from a river crossing Mahu and his dog made near there.

Te Orotu, the ancestor from whom Te Whanganui a Orotu takes its name, was a descendant of Mahu. Raniera Te Ahiko, an authority on the history of Heretaunga last century, spoke of Te Orotu in the Omahu hearing of 1889. "The land belonged to Turauwha and Orotu. Heipipi was their pa. Otatara was Ngati

Awa and Koaupari's pa. Orotu was father of Whatumamoa. Te Whanganui a Orotu was named after him."

Te Orotu is recorded as having two kainga or settlements on Te Whanganui a Orotu. The first, Tiheruheru is located on the mainland at Poraiti and the second on the island Tuteraanuku at the northern end of the Hawkes Bay airport. An oriori composed by Te Tahatu in the 1700s makes reference to Te Orotu.

*Kia noho ai taua i te kainga o to tipuna  
O Whatumamoa, i Heretaunga waiho e  
Te Orotu waiho ki a Whatumamoa nona  
Te kiri pango e mau i a taua nei e ki ia.*

*In ora... that we occupy the home  
of your ancestor Whatumamoa at Heretaunga  
left by Te Orotu to Whatumamoa  
whose dark skin we inherit.*

Te Orotu lies seven generations after Mahu Tapoanui in direct descent. Mahu Tapoanui, Hanui, Haroa, Hapouri, Hapotango, Hapokere, Hamaitawhiti, Te Orotu.

Ngati Awa, the descendants of Awanuiarangi, son of Toi Kairakau originated at Ohiwa in the Bay of Plenty. A nomadic people, they were not served kindly by history and survived as scattered remnants rather than as a strong united body.

Awanuiarangi is not known to have lived in Hawkes Bay. His grandson, Koaupari, an ener-





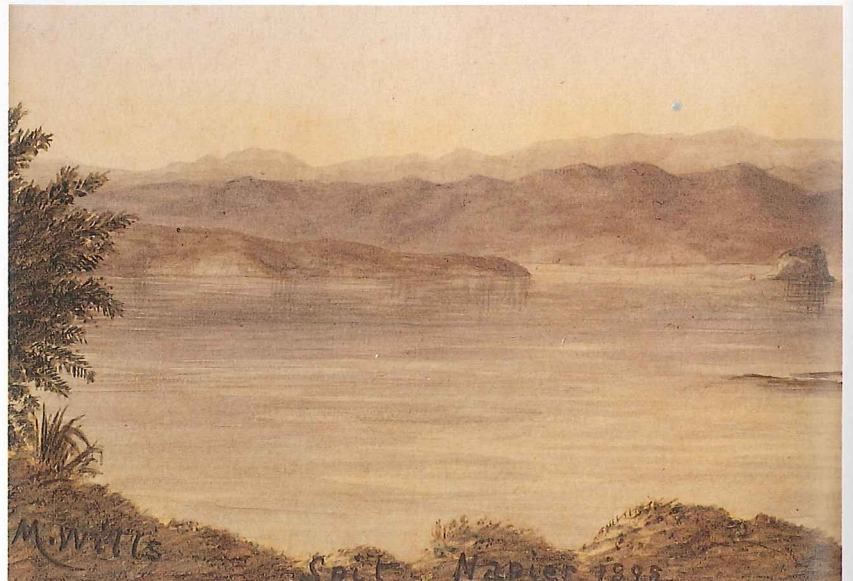
*Left: View of Otaia Pa, Roro o Kuri Island, in the 1880s, looking south. (Photo: Alexander Turnbull Library)*

*Below: View of Te Whanganui a Orotu from Battery Point, Napier Hill, 1898. (Painting: M. Wills / Collection of author)*

getic and adventurous man is reputed to have built Otatara, the Ngati Awa stronghold above the Hawkes Bay Polytech at Taradale. His nephew Pakaumoana was one of a handful of survivors when the Maruiwi tribe was driven over the chasm near Te Pohue. Pakaumoana made his way down to Heipipi pa where he married Hinetu sister of the high chief and powerful tohunga Tunui. His descendants lived at Otatara.

Another illustrious explorer chief who passed through Heretaunga was Tamatea Pokaiwhenua. Accompanied down the Hawkes Bay coast by his son Kahungunu, he had the second *Takitimu* canoe hauled through the opening at Keteketerau. The canoe was anchored in Whareponga Bay and father and son camped on Roro o Kuri island. One of the promontories is named Okahungunu. While camping there, Tamatea enjoyed the plentiful kaimoana. He continued his journey up the Ngaruroro River and while in the headwaters he spied a seagull. Food was scarce and he was reminded of the abundant supplies at Te Whanganui a Orotu. This was the inspiration for Tamatea's pepeha.

*Te karoro tangi tararau mai i runga o Taputeranga  
Te patiki tahanui o Otiere  
Te paua patoto mai i runga o Tahinga*



*Te pupu tangi mai i runga o Matarohirohi  
Te kiope pekenui o Rimariki  
Te aruhe maomaonui o Pukekohu.*

*The seagulls crying as they hover over Taputeranga  
The fat flounders of Otiere  
The paua knocking on the rocks at Tahinga  
The pupu crying at Matarohirohi  
The huge-quartered rats of Rimariki  
The thick-fleshed fern roots of Pukekohu.*



Turauwha was the high chief of Otatara at the time of the Kahungunu invasion led by Taraia I. He was of Ngati Awa descent on his father's side and his mother belonged to Ngati Whatumamoā. Through a mixture of conquest and intermarriage with the tangatawhenua, the three tribal groups were amalgamated. The mana rangatira of Te Whanganui a Orotu resides in their descendants to this day.

The outlet at Keteketerau was still in use when Captain Cook passed by in the early 1770s. Some time during the following fifty years Keteketerau blocked up and the rising waters of Te Whanganui a Orotu threatened to flood the cultivations on its shores. A visiting ancestor named Tu Ahuriri assisted in digging a new outlet near Scinde Island. The escaping water gouged out a permanent opening which was named Ahuriri in recognition of his services.

In 1851 the Crown Commissioner, Donald McLean, negotiated the purchase of the 106,000-hectare Ahuriri Block. Te Whanganui a Orotu was excluded from the purchase but the Crown assumed title to it by legislation in 1874 and vested it in the Napier Harbour Board. Dredging and reclamations soon followed to develop the harbour at Ahuriri. A causeway was begun in 1872 linking Scinde Island with Taradale. This restricted the south-east portion of Te Whanganui a Orotu which was virtually reclaimed when silt deposits backed up behind the causeway during the 1897 flood.

Construction began in 1915 on a road and rail embankment linking Scinde Island with Westshore. Two miles of tidal flow was restricted to a single bridged section by the time the embankment came into full use in 1921. Te Whanganui a Orotu was being systematically strangled.

The final catastrophe came in 1931 when the great earthquake struck. In one awesome upheaval, half the bed of Te Whanganui a Orotu was thrust up above water level. Every seagull on the East Coast seemed to get wind of it and they descended in droves on the rotting shellfish beds and myriads of fish stranded in pools and backwaters.

Today little remains of the once-celebrated Te Whanganui a Orotu; only a long narrow estuary constricted by stopbanks and studded with maimais. Agricultural and industrial pollution have made the remaining kaimoana unfit to eat. The Hawkes Bay airport, Landcorp Ahuriri, the Onekawa and Pandora industrial zones and a proposed motorway have all intruded upon a landscape which once knew a finer age.



*Above: The Ahuriri Estuary from Napier Hill. The footbridge over the estuary was built in 1880.*

*Below: Boating on the Inner Harbour in the 1880s. (Both photos: Alexander Turnbull Library)*

The Waitangi Tribunal is currently hearing a claim lodged by the seven hapu of Te Whanganui a Orotu. They are seeking the return of their ancient taonga which they claim was never sold or gifted to the Crown. They cite article two of the Treaty of Waitangi as the basis of their claim. □

**Patrick Parsons is a noted local historian and a member of the Hawkes Bay Branch Committee of the Historic Places Trust.**

