

Friends House Waiheke

History of the land

BY ROBIN WATTS

EDITOR'S NOTE: At Yearly Meeting 2024, Friends talked about understanding the provenance of land that Quaker Meeting houses are built on. If we see ourselves as stewards or kaitiaki, then we are part of a historic pathway that extends into the past and also into the future. To continue this discussion and reflection, here is some history about the provenance of Friends Meeting House on Waiheke Island.

Friends House Waiheke is the youngest Quaker Meeting House in Aotearoa New Zealand – the land was purchased in 1985, and the meeting house was completed in 1987. It looks over Palm Beach (Māwhitipana Bay) and out to the Hauraki Gulf. For over three centuries, Ngāti Paoa have been tangata whenua of Waiheke Island.

'Historic' Certificates of Title only go back to 1956 when the Waiheke Roads District body corporate was registered as the owner. In March 1957 it was purchased by Eileen Walker who sold it in February 1958 to Herman Carpenter and it remained in the Carpenter family until 1978, when it was sold to Graeme Ridler, who sold it to the Society of Friends Trust Board on 28 Feb 1985. However, the real history of the land goes back much further.

In 1985, the same year when Friends purchased property at Palm Beach, the Waitangi Tribunal's jurisdiction was extended to cover Crown acts and omissions since the signing of the Te Tiriti o Waitangi in 1840. This opened the historical record of Crown-Māori relationships to intense scrutiny. However, the Waiheke Island WAI 10 claim by Ngāti Paoa to the Waitangi Tribunal was one of the early claims and was reported back in June 1987 (about the time that Friends House construction was starting). As such, Ngāti Paoa's claim was constrained by the previous limitation of claims only back to 1975. Therefore, the judgement, while covering historical issues, could not consider historical redress for anything other than recent breaches.

From research by Paul Monin in 1996 for associated Waitangi Tribunal claims (WAI 406 and WAI 686), we now know some of the earlier land transaction history. This describes the 'alienation' (i.e. passing out of Māori ownership) of the Māwhitipana Block of 82 acres in 1868. Title was granted to 'Te Hinaki & others' on 9 Oct 1868 and the land was sold to George Graham on 7 Nov 1868, one month later. George Graham was the MP for Newton at the time and had amassed significant capital. He had come to New Zealand with Hobson and was present at the Treaty signing in Waitangi. Some of George Graham's other purchases happened on the same day as the granting of title, which suggests that plans to acquire the land had already been made. Graham subsequently sold much of the property, which was eventually converted to sheep farming.

How did these changes take place? A brief history of Māori settlement on Waiheke Island provides some context, and which is similar to other stories throughout Aotearoa.



Palm Beach in 1954 shows some houses, grazed farmland and a few trees. Two-storey Simkin House is visible to the right of centre. To the right of Simkin house a narrow walking track is visible which is now the driveway to Friends House, halfway up the hill. The headland at the right and some land beside it are part of the 2021 Ngāti Paoa settlement.

Whites Aviation – National Library WA-34314-F

Waiheke is not the original name for the motu – that was Te Motu-arai-roa – the ‘long sheltering island’. When the first European visitors arrived, it became known as Motu-Wai-Heke, ‘island of trickling waters’. At this time, the island was heavily forested.

Several iwi have connections to Waiheke Island but by the early 1830s it was Ngāti Paoa, a branch of Tainui, who claimed the island as tangata whenua. They were part of the Marutūāhu alliance with Ngāti Maru, Ngāti Whanaunga and Ngāti Tamaterā. Ngāti Paoa continued to live on Waiheke Island having repelled Ngāti Whātua who were moving south and were in residence when Captain Cook anchored off Waiheke in 1769, noting the large stands of kauri. The island became a stopping point for whalers and sealers doing ship repairs. By the end of the 18th century, ship-borne diseases, particularly measles and influenza, had caused the population to plummet. Logging of kauri and other resource extraction started.

During the early 19th century, the Ngāti Paoa population partially recovered, but in the early 1820s they were attacked by Ngāpuhi as part of the “Musket wars” raiding party on Tamaki Makaurau. Ngāti Paoa retreated down the Firth of Thames but suffered further losses. Ngāpuhi did not occupy Waiheke permanently, and Ngāti Paoa eventually returned to Waiheke, partly as the result of a marriage alliance between Eruera Patuone (Ngāpuhi) and Riria Takarangi (Ngāti Paoa).

Ngāti Paoa signed Te Tiriti in 1840, with the hope of peace and protection, but lost faith in the subsequent land sales process. Some Ngāti Paoa supported Tainui when Governor George Grey invaded the Waikato in 1863, and had land confiscated as a result, although less land was lost on Waiheke Island. In 1865, the newly created Māori Land Court refused to deal with iwi as distinct entities and commenced splitting up land and awarding blocks to individuals, which were then acquired and passed out of Māori ownership.

By the end of 1868, the splitting up of land into blocks reached the Māwhitipana Bay (Palm Beach) area, and it was quickly acquired by George Graham. Interestingly George Graham was described by one newspaper as “a well-known Māori sympathiser” when he resigned his Newton seat in the House of Representatives in early 1869. At this time, he was also a negotiator for peace with Waikato Māori on behalf of Governor George Grey and reportedly crossed the lines to speak with Wiremu Tāmihana, which resulted in the cessation of hostilities.

Over the next 50 years, nearly all Ngāti Paoa land on Waiheke Island was sold because of fragmentation and acquisition. An early proposal to create a reserve of 2100 acres at Te Huruhi was undermined by further land division in 1897. As the land was lost, people moved away from the island. The weakening of Ngāti Paoa had a knock-on effect: by the time that historic Treaty claims were being negotiated, the Ngāti Paoa voice was frequently missing due to lack of resources and loss of links to the land.

It was not until the 21st century that redress schemes included Ngāti Paoa, through the Ngāti Paoa Deed of Settlement, the Pare Hauraki Collective Redress Deed, the Marutūāhu Iwi Collective Redress Deed, and the Tāmaki Collective Deed. Even now, at the end of 2024, the Ngāti Paoa Settlement Bill and the Pare Hauraki Collective Redress Bill are still awaiting final readings in the New Zealand Parliament.

One positive local outcome from the Ngāti Paoa Settlement Deed is the inclusion of the Māwhitipana Reserve as part of their settlement – it includes the headland between the two parts of Palm Beach, land behind the smaller Palm Beach and a corridor down to the Miro Rd reserve. It is a very small part of what the iwi once had and is steep and not able to be used for anything apart from potential ecological restoration projects, but it does provide part of a flight corridor for native birds between Oneroa and Te Toki reserve, inland from Palm Beach.

So, as we look out over the sparkling water of Māwhitipana Bay from Friends House Waiheke it is worth remembering the history that we are an integral part of. Knowledge and understanding of the past are a first step.

The whakataukī on the Palm Beach bus shelter says: *Whatungarongaro te tangata, toitū te whenua - People will pass but the land will remain.*