

# Walking Cheerfully on Whose Land?

*A question for Quakers*

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**Arthur Wakefield and three surveyors, Frederick Tuckett, Samuel Stephens, and John Sylvanus Cotterell arrived in Whakatū Nelson in 1841-42 as part of the New Zealand Company's settlement. They all had Quaker connections and a keen interest in Britain's newest colony. They joined with Martha and Samuel Strong - also Quakers - to purchase Town Acre 667 where the Quaker Meeting house and burial ground would be established.**

John Cotterell spoke te reo Māori and was reported to have good relations with local iwi. He met the local chief Atopikiwara at Motueka Pā, who told him *"He saw no good in being paid for the land...but the best way would be for the white people to pay whenever they cut down a tree, built a house, or made a garden thus establishing a perpetual rent. This will, I think, be found the general idea of the New Zealand chiefs, as regards utu (payment)."*

Not everyone agreed with chief Atopikiwara's views about land purchases. Barnicoat and Cotterell met Te Watarauhi Nohorua, a Ngāti Toa chief at Ironside's house. He became angry that the Company planned to survey the Wairau and told Barnicoat that the Company could not have it.

Although Cotterell refused to bear arms, he was part of the group sent to the Wairau to arrest the Ngāti Toa chief Te Rauparaha on charges of arson. The charge was for burning down the huts of surveyors, including a hut that belonged to John Cotterell. Ngāti Toa had exhausted all other alternatives, petitioning the British government and removing the surveyors' equipment without other damage. An armed conflict followed and Cotterell after surrendering to a familiar Māori group, was later killed by another Māori group at 23 years of age.

The 1843 Wairau Confrontation was caused by dishonest land sales between Ngāti Toa and the New Zealand Company. This left 22 European settlers and up to 9 Māori dead - Aotearoa's first lethal conflict at the side of the Tuamarina stream, Marlborough. Governor Fitzroy investigated this incident, and he exonerated Te Rauparaha and Te Rangihaeata.

For 350 odd years we have walked cheerfully over the

Earth, answering that of God in all people – the last 150 or so of these, even here, in Aotearoa. But what of the land beneath our cheerful feet? How cheerfully, peacefully, and ethically was it acquired? What right relationships uphold its custodianship? If these relationships were not right, are we prepared to return the land?

As Friends we are required to reflect and act on the consequences of our past and ongoing actions and the effect they have had on the first people of our country. It is time to take stock and ask, how was the land under our Quaker Meeting Houses and other properties first acquired by Pākehā?

Our Advices and Queries ask us to:

Remember our obligation to honour the status of Māori as the indigenous people of Aotearoa and partners in the Treaty of Waitangi. Seek to discover the effects of the colonial and postcolonial history of Aotearoa. Work to ensure that the sharing of power and resources in our society is a genuine partnership.

As Friends we are more than a group of wishful thinkers who enjoy a quiet Sunday morning together. We live in the real world with the intention of creating heaven on earth rather than waiting for some afterlife. For many in our country we worship within the embrace of Papatūānuku, Earth Mother, that gave birth to all things, including humankind and it is the physical and spiritual basis for life. The piece of earth we now call Aotearoa remains within the tribal territory of particular iwi and hapū. It was not, according to the Waitangi Tribunal, ceded in 1840 by treaty. In the years that followed that signing, however, the vast majority of Aotearoa was either confiscated, acquired through suspect land sales, or taken by legislation such as the Public Works Act. We believe that these facts carry great responsibilities for Friends today.

The New Zealand public intellectual, Morgan Godfery, castigates liberals who love to talk about anti-racism but then maintain the status quo. For him:

"One reason progressives love committing to anti-

racism rather than, say, decolonisation is the former requires nothing more than a state of mind. “I’m not racist” – drop the spoken or unspoken “but” – and congratulations, you can wash away the guilt.

...But the trouble with recognition and its attendants, like the glossy history-tellers, is it’s a cunning standard. Does recognition restore Indigenous peoples’ power to develop and protect their land or does it just reinforce existing power relations?”

Academics Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang similarly remind us that “decolonization is not a metaphor.”

Our draft statement on the Treaty of Waitangi acknowledges that Pākehā have benefited directly or indirectly from colonisation. This process continues. The past is not over and done with: it is constantly with us. The dispossession of hapū from their lands laid the foundation of a land-based Pākehā economy from which the majority of us have benefited directly or indirectly. For Māori this dispossession, combined with discriminatory legislation and Crown practices in every area of life, led eventually to urbanisation and the weakening of whānau, hapū and iwi. The imposition of Pākehā institutional frameworks such as policing, education, health and childcare have increased the social problems they were meant to solve. Rising poverty and low wages, and lack of secure and affordable housing, have sharpened the dilemmas.

Some churches and Quaker Meetings around the world have already begun to put their house in order. The Pentecostal Curate Church handed over a \$3m worth of real estate in Tauranga to local iwi Ngāti Ranginui and its hapu Ngai Tamarawaho. The Presbyterian Church acknowledge that whilst some of some of its land was acquired through land sales and gifts, parts were likely taken by the crown following the New Zealand land wars of the 1860. They will now offer Māori the right of first refusal to land being sold to honour its Treaty commitments. Gifted land would be returned as a gift. Green Street Quaker Meeting in the US budgeted \$500,000 for reparations in Germantown, a neighbourhood in Philadelphia. Australian Friends have considered ways in which they can address the “Stolenwealth” and come into Right relationship with the Original Australians. Examples include The Pay the Rent committee on behalf of Queensland Regional Meeting that disburses funding of approximately \$8000 per year.

We acknowledge these well-established facts. The next step is to take action to uphold our testimonies to Integrity and Equality.

A first step to addressing our responsibilities is a research-based and independent audit of Quaker land use that gives us the required information to face up to our past and to corporately discern a way forward. As Quakers we are urged to come with “Heart and Mind” prepared when we sit and come to know ways forward. The information gathered from an audit of the lands we use will help us with such decision-making.

One path forward for such a ‘land audit’ is to encourage individual Quaker bodies or local meetings to set about having dialogue with their local hapū. The risk with this approach is that it proceeds in a piecemeal and ad hoc manner, dependent on the generosity of volunteers. Many Meetings are already struggling to maintain their current responsibilities. It may be that this is left in the too hard-basket with yet another platitude and well-intentioned statement.

A second (and in our view better) use of Quaker resources is to approach a land audit of all Quaker property in Aotearoa in a systematic and holistic way. In the context of the colonisation of Aotearoa, and the limited but important progress we have made as a nation to uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi, we are surprised this information is not readily available. At a secular level this could be seen as negligence and place us at risk of reputational damage. We no longer have the luxury of out of sight and out of mind. Our privilege has been built on the way Friends in Aotearoa has been established and continue to exercise power in Aotearoa. Can we claim the high ground by ignoring this matter?

We need to make available the necessary resources to employ an independent agency. This way we can gather the information and determine the next steps. It would demonstrate our real commitment to starting on this journey. This way we corporately demonstrate we have carried out our own homework.

Furthermore, we do not approach our Māori partners and demand that they use their beleaguered resources to inform us about breaches in Te Tiriti.

As Friends, we must be sure that right relationships were followed in the acquisition of our holdings. If this was not the case, then we must be sure to make them right. Quakers in Aotearoa could begin by funding an independent land audit.

Toi te kupu, toi te mana, toi te whenua.

*Note: For references, please read the version of this article on the Quaker website \ Selected articles.*