

## **Tasman, maps and myths: ways of looking at 19th Century NZ**

*Notes from seminar held at the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, Tuesday 26th October  
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Today I want to look at Belich's "Tasmen" idea and use it as a linking device between four stories about 19th century NZ. I want to consider part of his idea about the Tasman sea's role as a highway and a conduit - particularly in the first half of the 1800s - and also to raise some questions about the extent to which it remained a connector or became a barrier - and to encourage you to question whether you agree with Belich's idea, or my interpretation of it at least - and why.

I also want to look at the ideas of story and myth - what stories are told about our past? Why are those stories told rather than other ones? And also, by telling these four particular stories today, to challenge you to think about the historian's role in shaping our understandings about the past according to the stories they choose to tell, retell; to interpret and reinterpret. I guess we also need to consider the role of non-historians in shaping our understandings about the past – novelists, politicians, journalists and other media professionals – and the extent to which these are useful.

Finally, I'm a big fan of the historical atlas and I wanted to remind you that, even though there are now rafts of fantastic web-based resources, it's still a treasure box of information, ideas, stories and interpretations about NZ's history. It also puts those stories together in particular ways - which offer interesting opportunities to think about historical evidence and data. A vehicle like the atlas forces historians and mapmakers to dig beneath the notion of story in order to find the data and evidence that allows a map to become populated - but these maps can also create strong evocations of place - why it is and how it was...

If you're aiming for a scholarship, or for excellence endorsements in your final exams, you need to be able to take the stuff you know about NZ in the 19th century and shape it... you will be asked to examine patterns or even to find your own - and explain what the connections and disjunctions might be between different people, places, and events... I'm hoping to have a go at modeling how that might be done today - and in a way that jumps across some of the themes about settlement, colonisation, politics and the economy.

I've also chosen stories that confront what I think is a largely missing piece of our history - and historiography – and that is our relationships with Australia, primarily in the past

but also in the present. If you're interested in this you might want to follow up by checking out the work of Phillipa Mein-Smith, Peter Hemenstall and Donald Denoon – who have been working in the area of trans-Tasman history for a while now.

“Tasmen” picks up on Jamie Belich’s term for some of the Europeans who shaped our contact history: explorers, missionaries, whalers, sealers, traders – some of whom were as comfortable under sail and on the water, as they were on land. Further, it explores the connections that, as Steve pointed out in his talk, are not always fully explored, between NZ and our trans-Tasman neighbour: Australia – or, more accurately the Australian states...

One of Belich’s points about Tasmen was that the sea was a highway, a corridor, a powerful connector and field of interplay, during much of the 19th century – and this point about connectors and barriers will be referred to later.

I suppose I’m going to argue that by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Tasman had become more of a barrier than a conduit, but that for most of those years, it was an important link.

Myths and myth-making can be tricky territory, and stories to do with nation-making, settlement, contact, new societies and the outcomes of frontier histories, need to be handled with care. Whose stories are they? Why are they the ones that are current? are they stories of a particular group or groups? Why are other stories less well known? As Australian historian Inga Clendinnen cautioned in 2006 – “In my view it is the historian's job to unscramble what actually happened from whatever the current myth might be, and to inquire into what the myth-makers are up to - not to play at myth-making too.”

But myth and story are our hooks into history – ask yourself, what is it that draws me to this subject? It can’t be that it’s easy, because it’s not... it’s complicated and multi-layered – but one of the interesting things about the work of historians is that much of it is about taking the jigsaw puzzle pieces of the past – and attempting to put them together in ways that create a coherent picture or whole. Is the sum of the whole greater than that of the individual parts? Does the whole accurately reflect the sum of those parts? Histories can distort as much as enlighten – bringing us to the beauty of historiography, contested interpretations, different readings, the challenge of applying different ideas to evidence...

Robert McNab, writing in 1914, in his book *From Tasman to Marsden* was keenly aware of this, noting the difficulties of fairly representing NZ's history. In his view, for example, in missionary accounts ‘natives’ could do no wrong, whereas in whalers’ and sailors’ accounts of early NZ ‘natives’ could do no right. He was keenly aware that he had a responsibility to try and sift through these conflicting views in order to try and come up with something closer to a reasonable account. He was also aware of his own failings in

this area, admitting a lack of understanding of Maori history and of Maori experiences, acknowledging his debt to the Polynesian society and to people like Elsdon Best, and his reliance on them.

If you're interested in early general histories visit the electronic text centre (nzetc.org) - lots of early histories available there offering interesting insights into the way NZ's historiography was already developing 100 years ago. Also, check out Papers Past for contemporary reports and useful context. <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast>

Today is not so much about offering you lots of useful detail – sorry about that – it's more about providing you with an example of how you might want to challenge yourself to make sense of aspects of 19th century NZ – both with the exams in mind – and with the larger reference points of “why bother?” and “what drives me to consider NZ history/ies?” This approach is not only useful as you construct answers to the questions and interpretations posed in the exams, but also as you read historians' interpretations, first person accounts and documents of past events. It's not necessarily just a matter of wondering about the lenses people bring to these accounts, but also about consideration of the nature of identity, place and belonging – as these have been contested elements of our history and historiography – and continue to be today.

The first of the four stories is about Marsden. Known as the flogging parson in Parramatta, he reinvented himself in the Bay of Islands as NZ's first father christmas and bringer of all things good... civilisation AND Christianity.

Read his biography in the DNZB and you find a wealth of detail about his effective work to support the establishment of functioning missions in the far north – and also the respect in which he was held by a number of NgaPuhi chiefs and hapu. But his work in Australia is remembered in a different light...

Marsden had been given a grant of 100 acres of land on his arrival [in late 1790s], but by 1827 his holdings included 3,631 by grant and 1,600 by purchase. He used convict labour on his farms, and despite his ravings against drunkenness did not hesitate to pay his workers with the going currency - rum, without which, he asserted that "the dispirited, indolent convict cannot be excited to exertion".

It is true that Marsden made important contributions to the establishment of the agricultural economy of New South Wales, but his main claim to fame was his severity as a magistrate, a post he accepted soon after his arrival. In September 1800, in the course of an enquiry into a suspected uprising of Irish convicts, he had a suspect flogged, hoping for a confession. Marsden was on record as having a hatred for the Catholic religion, and that it would contribute to lawlessness. The suspect Paddy Galvin suffered 300 lashes, and according to one onlooker "he got one hundred on his back and you could see the bones

between his shoulder blades...his ribs were in such a jelly that the Doctor ordered that he be flogged on the calves of his legs".

In 1807 Marsden actually attempted to classify every woman in the colony according to her status as married or a "concubine". Such zeal for sniffing out sinners and his harshness as a magistrate may be explained by his religious passion, but it put paid to his attempts to bring salvation to the convict population, who observed among themselves that: " He sentences the prisoner on Saturday, admonishes him from the pulpit on Sunday, and flogs him on Monday; the Lord have mercy on you, for his Reverence will have none".

It is unfortunate that Marsden's reputation as the "flogging parson" has so overshadowed his other achievements. There are streets named after him in New Zealand, and there is no doubt that he contributed

[http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/australian\\_history\\_and\\_culture/114365/2](http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/australian_history_and_culture/114365/2)

The second of the four stories is about Betty Guard. Betty's adventures have been fictionalised – even sensationalised in her own lifetime – and serve as an interesting commentary on people's fears about the frontier – the margins – of land and sea.

Stories about Betty Guard touch on a number of frontier society triggers – agency, and whose story gets priority – the Maori, the Europeans, the men, the women, the victors, the wounded... her status as wife of a former convict is also interesting – before they set off for the opportunities that NZ afforded, and after the events that established her fame/notoriety.

She was probably 15 when first came to NZ c1830 – with her husband John – former convict, turned sealer, trader and sea captain. They settled in the Marlborough Sounds and established NZ's first shore whaling station, Te Awaiti.

Following shipwreck and attack by Taranaki Maori (and a couple of ship's deserters) whilst sailing home from a trip to Sydney in 1834, Betty was taken hostage. Accounts vary as to her treatment. Eventually John (Jacky) and others were allowed to return to Sydney to seek ransom. What happened to Betty during that time was cause of significant speculation:

Moreover, there were hints by contemporaries that **Betty Guard** had given birth in Sydney to twins fathered by Oaoiti. Edward Markham helped spread the rumour by referring to it in his book, *New Zealand or recollections of it*: 'before I left Sydney, I heard that she was brought to bed of Twins & they were rather dark.' It is possible that **Betty Guard** had twins on her return to Sydney, but it is also recorded that on 22 November 1835 she gave birth to Thomas, her second son by Jacky Guard. In early 1836 she returned to Kakapo Bay with her family in the schooner *Industry* to continue her life in New Zealand. (DNZB essay)

There was significant public criticism of the way the soldiers and crew of the Alligator

acted in regaining Betty and other captives and it was generally felt that they used far more force than was required. This is worth considering given the ways in which race relations went on to develop following the establishment of the NZ Company settlement in New Plymouth... Or, is it just a really fantastic story which has meant that its place in our history is over-emphasised? Because Betty's story has been used as the basis of Fiona Kidmans' *The Captive Wife*, hers is a useful case study on which to base discussions about the challenges and opportunities that historical fiction can afford history students.

The third story is about the period in the 1860s marked by the passage of the lands for settlement act. This was a deliberate assertion of crown control – and came at the same time as the pakeha 'swamping' effect began to take hold. However, this period is marked by different stories for different islands – many provinces of the north island were at war – but the south island story of the 1860s is gold.

Both the wars and the gold rushes brought thousands of Australians to NZ, some of whom became settlers, some of whom continued to travel between the two countries – and also America. Te Ara has good coverage of the Australian influxes of the 1860s and there are also excellent examples of soldier, goldminer and other settler stories from the 1860s in the DNZB.

Such was the coming and going between NZ and Australia during the gold rushes that Hokitika was described as a suburb of Melbourne. And while it still took approximately two weeks to travel from Dunedin to Auckland (see NZHA plate 52) you could travel from Melbourne to Bluff in five days.

However, the wealth generated by the goldrushes and the huge influx of settlers, combined with support from the Vogel government of the 1870s, led to rapid development of infrastructure – and the beginnings of the shift from provincial to central government dominance.

The railway between Christchurch and Dunedin was in place by 1878 and extended to Invercargill by 1879 (However, there was no rail link to Picton until the 1940s. The development of the maintrunk line in the North Island was a slightly different matter:

The central North Island posed greater challenges to rail-builders than the South Island's eastern plains. A main trunk railway between Auckland and Wellington was discussed from the 1860s, but progress was slow. By 1880 Auckland's southern line reached Te Awamutu, and there were isolated sections of line between Wellington and Wairarapa, and in Taranaki, Manawatū and Hawke's Bay. Further progress was blocked by rugged mountains, dense forests and the Māori stronghold of Te Rohe Pōtae (the King Country).

Despite these challenges, exploratory survey work began in 1882. Two years later a Parliamentary committee opted for a central route rather than western or eastern alternatives. The government also reached a crucial agreement with Ngāti Maniapoto leaders to open up the King Country to the railway.

On 15 April 1885 politicians and Māori leaders ceremonially ‘turned the first sod’ of the central section by the Puniu River, near Te Awamutu. It would take 23 years to complete the 680-kilometre North Island main trunk (NIMT). Progress was slow in the 1890s, but work intensified after 1900.

<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/railways/2>

The last story is about Australian federation in 1901 and the stamp of national identity that was clearly emergent by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When faced with the opportunity to join the Australian states in federation, NZ chose not to – for approximately 1200 reasons:

Sir John Hall, a New Zealand representative at the Australasian Federation Conference in 1890, remarked then that: ‘Nature has made 1,200 impediments to the inclusion of New Zealand in any such federation in the 1,200 miles of stormy ocean which lie between us and our brethren in Australia’. However, Hall went on to say: ‘That does not prevent the existence of a community of interests between us’. Such communities are legion in number and strong today. There is plenty of evidence that the trans-Tasman relationship prospers wherever such communities of interest exist.

<http://www.nzac.canterbury.ac.nz/docs/Communityattitudes.pdf>

If you’re interested in the federation debate, Keith Sinclair gives a concise summary of its history in chapter five of *Tasman Relations*. He makes the point that federation has been largely ignored by historians. He also notes, in terms of trans-Tasman relationships, that the 1890 maritime strike somewhat soured people’s fondness for forging closer bonds of trans-Tasman kinship.

In *Remaking the Tasman world* Phillipa Mein Smith suggests that by NOT federating NZ was defining itself as NOT Australian. Further, notions of NZers as better than Australians (no convict stain) and our supposedly better record on race relations, held some currency at the time. Finally, NZ voters were fully enfranchised at the turn of the century – Australians were not – and there were concerns about whether federation might lead to an erosion of New Zealanders’ hard won rights...

So, these snippets trace the development of what is to become a country – from the years prior to the signing of the united tribes declaration in 1835, through the war years and the gold rush years, and on to the era of steam, refrigeration, telegraph, and even imperial warfare (ie, Boer War – as opposed to NZ’s wars) – with an emergent sense of statehood and of nationhood.

Any one of you could choose four different events and weave them together in any number of ways. I’m not being entirely relativist, nor am I suggesting that historians have licence to make stuff up. But, histories can be patterned and presented in certain

ways so one of your jobs – as history students – is to develop informed views about the stories, interpretations and patterns that resonate for you – and to come up with reasons and evidence that help to explain why that is.