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1812?–1893

Doctor, administrator, scholar, linguist

This biography, written by Atholl Anderson, was first published in the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography in 1990. It was updated in December, 2013.

Edward Shortland was the third son of Captain Thomas George Shortland, RN, and his wife, Elizabeth Tonkin, of Courtlands, near Plymouth, England. He was baptised on 19 May 1812 at Charles, Devon. By 1851 he was married to Eugenia Maria Francisca Basilica Ilardi, who was born in Palermo, Sicily. They had 11 children: 4 sons and 7 daughters. Shortland died at Plympton, near Plymouth, Devon, on 1 July 1893.

He was educated at Exeter Grammar School, Harrow and Pembroke College, Cambridge, where he graduated BA in 1835 and MA in 1839. He then studied medicine and was admitted an extra-licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians in 1839. At the invitation of his eldest brother, Willoughby, who had accompanied Lieutenant Governor William Hobson to New Zealand, Edward Shortland arrived in the colony in March 1841, and on 25 June succeeded James Coates as private secretary to the governor.

In March 1842 Shortland became involved in a series of duelling challenges between an Auckland land trading coterie and a group which included his brother's father-in-law, R. A. Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald and Shortland supported Hobson's land claim bills and favoured greater legislative control. The somewhat farcical affair concluded without bloodshed. However, Shortland's instincts in the matter of land sales were soon transformed into firm convictions by his first extended contact with the Māori in April 1842 when, with Captain A. D. W. Best, he accompanied the governor on a tour of Waikato.

Shortland was anxious to learn about the Māori language and way of life. He found ample opportunity to do so on the Waikato journey. The mana of the official party guaranteed the frequent company of such learned chiefs as Pōtatau Te Wherowhero of Ngāti Mahuta. In a mere 28 days Shortland acquired an unusually mature grasp of tribal politics and an affection for Māori people which set the tone of his subsequent career.

In July and August 1842 he accompanied George Clarke, protector of aborigines, to the Thames District where a serious tribal dispute involving the Hauraki chief Tāraia Ngākuti Te Tumuhuia threatened the authority of the Crown. On returning to Auckland Shortland took up appointment as police magistrate and sub-protector of aborigines for the Eastern District.

This district contained some 25,000 Māori. There were four main groups: the tribes of the Hauraki area and Ngāti Whakaue of Rotorua, who were allied against Ngāti Haua on the Waikato border and Ngāti Awa in the Bay of Plenty. In October Shortland set up his headquarters at Maketū. He was required to mediate between Europeans and Māori over stock trespassing on tapu land, cursing and other matters, and between Māori over the ownership of land, usufruct and transfer of land to Europeans. The most serious problem was Tāraia's claim to the Katikati block. Shortland, assisted by his interpreter, Edward Meurant, painstakingly picked through the layers of this dispute to its core of ancestral grievances, and concluded that the Crown should purchase the land and Tāraia's claim should not be allowed.

On 11 July 1843 Shortland received an order to accompany Colonel E. L. Godfrey to the South Island. He was to act as interpreter at courts of inquiry into land claims, and to collect information relevant to native tenure. On his way south Shortland went with Clarke to Ōtaki to visit Te Rauparaha and take down his version of the Wairau affray, which had occurred on 17 June.

On 8 August Shortland embarked on the government brig *Victoria* together with his assistants from the Bay of Plenty, Kereopa and Huehue, who were to accompany him on all his southern travels. At Akaroa he found accommodation with Commodore A. Bérard and heard, with Godfrey, the claims of the Nanto-Bordelaise company. Although these were largely disallowed, the amicable Bérard arranged a passage to Otago for Godfrey and Shortland on 11 September. Among the cases they heard were the claims by the Waikouaiti whaler John Jones, who brought as supporters the chiefs Karetai and Hōne Tūhawaiki. From the latter, the principal southern chief of Ngāi Tahu, Shortland acquired a framework of South Island Māori history and genealogy. When Godfrey departed on 15 October, Shortland became free to begin a survey of native settlements.

Leaving Te Rauone, near Ōtākou, he sailed for Waikouaiti and from there visited two other Māori settlements associated with whaling stations at Pūrākaunui (Purakanui) and Moeraki. At the latter he met Matiaha Tiramōrehu, a respected tohunga, who was able to provide Shortland with a perspective complementary to Tūhawaiki's evidence. Using both sources Shortland compiled the first brief but authoritative written history of the South Island Māori. His experience was further extended in November when he accompanied Jones, and the notable sealer and whaler Tommy Chaseland, on a voyage to the whaling stations at Tautuku, Bluff and Aparima, and also to Ruapuke Island. Tūhawaiki, and Tōpi Pātuki, his eventual successor, offered further historical observations and sketched and named stretches of the Fiordland and Foveaux Strait coasts. Thus incomparably prepared, Shortland began his overland journeys and detailed census of southern Māori.

His first foray, in December 1843, was intended to cover the settlements between Ōtākou and Foveaux Strait. He was accompanied by Percy Earl, a specimen collector, to whom he had shown the swamp deposit of moa bones recently discovered at Waikouaiti. The party walked along the coast from the head of Otago Harbour to Taieri Mouth and then proceeded by canoe upriver to a Māori settlement. There the chief Te Raki (Te Puke) declined to guide them to Molyneux (the mouth of the Clutha River), because, since Māori had begun to travel by whaleboats, the overland tracks were no longer readily passable. The party returned by way of Taieri Plain to Waikouaiti.

On 4 January 1844 Shortland set out to walk to Akaroa. His guides were Pukurakau, who took him as far as Waitaki, and then Poua, a young brother of the Temuka chief Tarawata. With their assistance he compiled a comprehensive census at each settlement along the way and made notes on a variety of topics. He also recorded the earliest account of the major southern canoe myth, Arai-te-uru, mentioning topographical symbols such as the hills Pokeiwitahi and Puketapu and the Katiki beach boulders. On the banks of the Waitaki River Shortland spent six days with the chief Te Huruhuru, 'a man of singularly pleasing manners and address', from whom he recorded the earliest coherent account of Ngāti Tama leader Te Pūoho-o-te-rangi's southern raid in 1836, and obtained the first sketch map and description of the Otago lakes district and other inland features. Shortland also took the opportunity to record various domestic activities: the gathering and cooking of fern root, the making of sandals and scent, and the construction and use of the characteristic reed-bundle watercraft of this region.

On 16 January he met Bishop G. A. Selwyn, travelling south, at Waihao. Two days later he passed the abandoned whaling station at Timaru and fell in with a group of Waikouaiti Māori in charge of several whaleboats loaded with preserved tītī (muttonbirds), presents for their kin at Te Waiateruati, near Temuka. Here Shortland recorded the manufacture of kāuru, an important sugary food derived from the roots of the young cabbage-tree, and further evidence of the tītī exchange system, both industries of considerable traditional significance. The party reached Akaroa on 31 January and Shortland spent the following two weeks visiting other Banks Peninsula Māori settlements, at Wakaoroi (Pigeon Bay) and Puari (Port Levy), as well as European farms. He had a difficult meeting with the principal chiefs, Iwikau and Taiaroa, and was called on to settle several disputes over land and other property. On 19 February Shortland sailed for Wellington, and then for Auckland, on the *Victoria*.

Although quite brief, this southern interlude appears, in retrospect, the high point of Shortland's colonial career. He regarded the South Island as far more suitable for European colonisation than the North Island because of its 'continuous and extensive block of land, unembarrassed by the claims of native proprietors'; where Māori social and political structures were manifestly less complicated; and where relations between Māori and European were generally cordial. On his return to the North Island he was able to approach the duties of a sub-protector with greater optimism, curiosity and enthusiasm. His surviving journals of this period, and his later book, *The southern districts of New Zealand: a journal with passing notices of the customs of the aborigines*, provide a remarkably lively and detailed picture of southern Māori on the eve of planned Pākehā colonisation. The full census data, the abundant observations of Māori life, the important records of myth and tradition, and the brief attempt at a vocabulary of Ngāi Tahu dialect, make this the seminal work of South Island Māori history and ethnography.

On his return to Maketū, Shortland found his career beginning to decline. His salary, earlier £150, was cut to £90 per annum. He considered resigning but decided against it. With reluctance, he accepted a posting as sub-protector of aborigines in Wellington and left Maketū in April 1845, after being persuaded by the Tauranga chiefs to allow Tāraia's claim in the Katikati settlement.

Wellington was the low point of his career. He had expressed a wish 'not to...be involved in land questions under examination by Commissioner Spain' and yet was now concerned mainly with facilitating the sale of land to Pākehā settlers after Spain's investigations. In August Shortland was relieved to resign in favour of Henry Tacy Kemp. He returned to

Auckland where he had obtained a position as interpreter to Colonel Henry Despard, commander of the forces ranged against Hōne Heke and Kawiti. At the conclusion of the northern war, in January 1846, Shortland's services were mentioned in a dispatch (and later rewarded with a war medal). He returned soon after to England.

During most of the period 1846–50 Shortland travelled on the Continent. In 1851 he was back in Plymouth and practising as a physician. His thoughts, however, were of New Zealand. During that year he asked the Earl of Mount-Edgcumbe to send a herd of deer to New Zealand (the earl obliged), and he also published *The southern districts of New Zealand*, followed, in 1854, by *Traditions and superstitions of the New Zealanders*.

The latter volume is somewhat eclectic. It gives summaries of some major canoe chronicles, cosmological ideas and formative traditions which draw on George Grey's *Polynesian mythology, and ancient traditional history of the New Zealand race, as furnished by their priests and chiefs*, also published (in Māori) in 1854. Many of the descriptions of Māori lore are similar to those in the Reverend Richard Taylor's 1855 work, *Te ika ā Maui, or New Zealand and its inhabitants*. But other topics, such as spiritualism, rites of passage, and Māori views concerning tapu, sickness and land tenure, have an immediacy that is lacking in the accounts of Grey and Taylor. This is because usually Shortland wrote from direct experience or from the testimony of named informants, including Tiramōrehu, Wiremu Tāmihana Tarapīpipi and Tāmihana Te Rauparaha.

In 1860 Shortland became a member of the Royal College of Physicians. Some biographies state that he served in Giuseppe Garibaldi's Sicilian campaign that year. In 1862, at the urging of William Martin, former chief justice of New Zealand, Shortland returned to New Zealand to assist Governor George Grey in implementing a new scheme for management of Māori affairs. There were to be 20 districts, each headed by a civil commissioner but with Māori magistrates. In appointing Shortland to the post of civil commissioner for Waihou, in the Hauraki area, on 30 December 1862, the governor's secretary, F. D. Hill, observed that it was Shortland's task to restore the confidence of the Māori in the British government, although he conceded that confidence was a plant of slow growth.

On 14 August 1863 Shortland was promoted to native secretary, the principal government post in dealing with Māori issues. He served only a short period before returning to England in 1865. The next three years were spent with his family in Italy, mainly in Palermo, on Sicily, but in 1869 he returned to New Zealand and took up residence in Parnell, Auckland. Still deeply interested in Māori land problems, he proposed, together with Martin, a plan for rationalising the procedures for land transfer. The Martin–Shortland plan recommended that only government surveyors should be used and that evidence of ownership should be established by commissioners rather than by lengthy argument before the native land courts. Neither of these proposed improvements, nor any others, were adopted.

In February 1873 Shortland won £30 in a competition for designing improvements to the Albert Barracks Reserve. Disgruntled competitors and their supporters claimed that he had influence with the judges. The matter was aired at length in the Auckland newspapers and Shortland eventually received his prize. In June the same year he returned to England.

However, in 1880 he came back to New Zealand and lived again in Parnell. In 1882 he published his major work on tradition and mythology, *Māori religion and mythology*. This

includes an extensive survey of Te Arawa traditions, on which Shortland was the leading European authority, and a version of Tiramōrehu's South Island Māori cosmogony. In 1883 his informal textbook on the Māori language, *How to learn Māori, a short treatise on the structure and idiom of the language*, appeared.

In October 1889 Shortland returned to England for the last time, and was described on his departure as an author of great repute and 'the most efficient Maori scholar probably the colony possesses'. In his administrative posts Shortland proved himself to be extremely competent and far-sighted. His main contribution to the development of New Zealand lies, however, in his systematic inquiries into Māori myth and tradition. At his death Edward Tregear and S. Percy Smith, editors for the Polynesian Society, of which Shortland had been an honorary member, described his works as standard authorities and Shortland himself as 'a ripe scholar, and a genial warm hearted friend'. It could be claimed that he was the first anthropologist of the Māori.

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