

**On Becoming “Colonially Bitten”.
The Reminiscences of John George Cooke and his Sojourn
to Aotearoa New Zealand, 1841 – 1850**

Helene Connor



Fig. 1: John George Cooke (1819–1880), early 1850s, salt print.
Carlyle album, © National Portrait Gallery, London, NPGP171 (9).
Photograph attributed to Sir Anthony Coningham Sterling, KCB (1805-1871).

Introduction and Background to the Reminiscences of John George Cooke (1819–1880)

In this preamble John George Cooke (1819-1880) is briefly introduced and some background to the reminiscences and their context is provided. Cooke was an upper-class Englishman who having been, in his words, “colonially bitten”, sailed out to Aotearoa New Zealand in

1841 (51).¹ Cooke was a young man of 22 years when he set forth on his colonial adventure after a brief military career in both the navy and the army. He settled in Taranaki, becoming a leader in the colony, having been made a magistrate in 1842 and often acting as a spokesman for the settler community (Stevens²). Cooke had a common law Māori wife, Ngapei Ngātata (c.1811–1906), to whom he had two children, Te Piki Ngātata also known as Mary Ann Cooke (1843 -1932) (my great, great grandmother) and George Grey Cooke (1848 – 1865). Through Ngapei Ngātata, Cooke made several connections with Māori leaders, particularly his ‘brother-in-law’, Wiremu (Wi Tako) Ngātata (c. 1807–1887). Cooke returned to England in 1851 (88).

Cooke’s unpublished memoir, “Reminiscences. Excerpta de ma vie. Souvenirs. Reminiscences of John George Cooke”, was written in 1876 some four years prior to his death in October 1880. The circumstances which led him to write his memoir are clouded in infamy and disgrace. At this time, Cooke had made a “terrible shipwreck of character, life, fortune and family” (Stevens). Having set himself up as a stockbroker he lost his own money and that of relatives and friends, and “sold securities and deeds that belonged to others” (Stevens). He abandoned his wife, Margaret Townsend Ward Cooke (1837–1912), and his family, to debts totalling over £45,000 (Stevens) (approximately equivalent to £10,043,323.77 in 2021³), and fled to Sweden. Plunged into penury, his wife, family, and friends initially believed he had died from suicide. It was during this period of exile that he wrote his reminiscences (Stevens).

Cooke commenced his memoir on 4 August 1876 with the following introduction:

In writing a few sketches of my life which has been varied and busy, and in putting in detail the errors and mistakes which I have fallen into during the latter part, it is more with the hope that if Edward⁴ reads these lines at any time, my faults may be as beacons

to him to steer clear of the rocks and quick-sands into which I have drifted; howbeit I was a victim to a gang of robbers, it is no excuse for my imprudent and wrong doings (1).

In brief, the reminiscences provide details of his family background and genealogy, his early life, schooling and military training, a period living in Germany, his time living in colonial New Zealand, his subsequent return to England and his reunion with family and friends, including many literati of the day. The reminiscences cease abruptly in 1851, though there may be a further volume, yet to be discovered. Cooke’s name does, however, continue to appear in the archives. He is frequently mentioned in the letters of Jane Welsh Carlyle (1801-1866), wife of Thomas Carlyle, the British historian and philosopher, and in the letters between the novelist, Geraldine Jewsbury (1812-1880) and Walter Baldock Durrant Mantell (1820 – 1895)⁵ (Stevens).

¹ Page numbers for Cooke’s Reminiscences have been taken from a type-written transcription of the original handwritten manuscript. The transcript consists of 93 pages and 48,734 words.

² There are no page numbers in Joan Stevens’s online paper.

³ Figure obtained via official inflation calculator <https://www.officialdata.org/uk/inflation>

⁴ The ‘Edward’ Cooke referred to is likely his stepson, Edward William Townsend Ward (1861-1921), son of Crosbie Ward (1833-1867) and Margaret Townsend Ward (1837-1912).

⁵ Walter Baldock Durrant Mantell (1820 – 1895) held a variety of posts in the New Zealand Colonial government. In August 1848 Mantell was appointed to the office of Commissioner for Extinguishing Natives’

Professor Joan Stevens, CBE (1908-1990) and her interest in John George Cooke

Professor Joan Stevens, CBE, was a lecturer in English Literature at Victoria University College, in Wellington, from 1947 to 1973. She became a professor in 1971, one of the first women to be appointed professor in New Zealand (Johnston). Professor Stevens became interested in Cooke and his connection to the English novelist, Jane Austen (1775–1817). Cooke was related to Jane Austen, via his mother Elizabeth Motley Austen Skyring Cooke (1780–1858). In her 1969 paper, “John George Cooke and his literary connections”, Stevens states: “Cooke had the distinction of being a relation of Jane Austen. It seems therefore worthwhile to assemble here some of the facts of his life.” Quite how Professor Stevens came to know of Cooke’s relationship to Jane Austen and his connections to other literary figures is unclear. However, it was Joan Stevens who unearthed Cooke’s reminiscences⁶ and other papers and letters, and fortuitously deposited them into the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington, which holds New Zealand’s national documentary heritage collections.

Memoir and Memory

Cooke penned his memoir in 1876, some 26 years after he left Aotearoa New Zealand and returned to England. Arthur Brochner (198) argues that the activity of remembering is an essential quality of self-narratives. Remembering is anchored in one’s memory and eventually, when writing personal narrative and memoir, there comes a time when the workings of memory need to be interrogated. Terms such as ‘remembering’ and ‘recollecting’ involve some kind of transformation, some kind of representation of the past.

When Cooke wrote his memoir, remembering and recollecting his past, it is probable he viewed his memories as authentic truths. Reading his memoir some 146 years after it was written does, however, require an in-depth reading, mining for meaning and interrogating the text. His memoir can be viewed as a form of cultural production, embodying the discourses of his class, society and the Victorian era he inhabited. As Ira Nadel argues, personal narratives cannot isolate the subject from his or her culture, conventions of birth, education, career and death (74).

Cooke’s memoir can also be viewed as being “documents of life” (Denzin 83). Documents of life can include diaries, letters, memoir, obituaries, photographs, family genealogy and official records. Documents of life, as in Cooke’s case, frequently describe turning-point moments in individual lives.

Titles, Middle Island (South Island), with the initial responsibility of setting aside reserves for Ngai Tahu iwi (tribe) within the Canterbury block. Mantell was instructed to induce Ngai Tahu to combine their numerous settlements into as few localities as possible, while making “liberal provision for their present and future wants”. The promises he and others made to Ngai Tahu were not fulfilled, a concern that was to haunt his conscience and affect his career for the rest of his life (Sorrenson).

⁶ Joan Stevens mentions that the original copy of Cooke’s memoir was held by Rear Admiral Arthur David Torlesse (1902-1995) who resided in Hampshire, England. Arthur Torlesse was the grandson of Margaret Townsend Ward Cooke’s sister, Alicia Townsend Torlesse (1827-1909) and her husband Charles Obins Torlesse (1825-1866).

Archival primary documents, such as Cooke's unpublished memoir, offer historical insights and what A. K. M. Skarpelis describes as "acts of recovery of life, processes, and events; the turning of life into a record; and the movement of a file from collection to preservation and use" (385). Cooke's memoir can be re-produced from what the archive has preserved, yet his production of his social and cultural life needs to be viewed as a process that was entirely dependent on his own remembering and what he chose to include and what he chose to omit. As an artifact, Cooke's *Reminiscences* tell us a story, albeit an incomplete story about his life and social identity. While much of what he wrote can be viewed as a selective preservation of what he chose to record and therefore is somewhat restricted, one of the gifts of archival research is that it allows the dead to return to life.

Katie Barclay (459) argues for the importance of acknowledging our emotional responses in archival research as a productive contribution to historical knowledge-making, particularly for those of us who research the dead. Barclay explores her emotional response and her attempt to 'fall in love' with the "highly unlikeable Scottish banker Gilbert Innes of Stowe (1751-1832)". In delving into the archives of John George Cooke, I engaged with similar emotions to Barclay. While I did not feel the need to 'fall in love' with Cooke, I did feel the need to develop empathy and perhaps a smidgen of fondness. After all, I am his direct descendant. Kinship aside, Cooke's narrative evokes an image of a man whose privilege blinded him to the consequences of his actions. Privilege is invisible to those who have it and Cooke seemed to be oblivious to his arrogance and snobbishness. His memoir constructs his family background with all the pretentiousness of someone who considered himself a representative of the English upper-class. It establishes his 'pedigree'. This belief in social hierarchy was perhaps the one value which encapsulates the essence of Victorianism (Girouard 60), and for Cooke, his family connections, particularly to Jane Austen, were a source of pride and vanity.

A "few sketches" of John George Cooke's Family History and Military training

Cooke's father, Christopher Cooke (1759-1834), was a Naval Agent who made a sizeable fortune from the French Wars and bought a country estate, Ashgrove at Sevenoaks in Kent (Stevens). Christopher Cooke's second wife, Elizabeth Motley Austen Skyring, was a widow with two daughters. John George Cooke, born 15 November 1819 at Ashgrove, was the second son and fifth child of Christopher and Elizabeth.

Elizabeth was the daughter of Francis Motley Austen, first cousin to Reverend George Austen of Steventon (1731–1805), father of the English novelist, Jane Austen. Cooke also had a further connection to Jane Austen through Jane's mother, Cassandra Leigh Austen (1739-1827) whose cousin married the Reverend Samuel Cooke, godfather to Jane. The kinship and closeness between the Cookes and Austens resulted in many visits amongst the two families.

The Campions and Austens of course came and we went to them. Our kindest relatives being our uncle George and Mrs. George Austen, who lived in Sevenoaks and were without children. Mrs. George Austen was of an East Kent family and we were always received and treated as their own children. The Austens of Sevenoaks and in Kent generally, are an eminently disagreeable and consequential race, but my uncle and aunt were kind and affectionate to all of us (Cooke 10).

Cooke referred to Jane Austen as “my beloved Jane Austen, whose works I knew by heart” (Cooke 17). He does not mention any particular Austen novel in his memoir though it is plausible to surmise that he was attracted to works that portrayed naval officers in romantic terms as this was the world he inhabited. Roger Fulford argues that Austen made her naval men into model gentlemen who were chivalric, authoritative and paternalist (171). Her works of fiction enabled her to imagine such characters in both domestic and imperial roles. For Austen, politics began at home, with manners and morals, but home stood at the centre of nation and empire. Such sentiments would have resonated with Cooke and men of his class.

In 1827, when Cooke was not quite eight years old, he was enrolled at Westergate House, West Sussex, under the tutelage of Rev. William Stevens Bayton (1771 – 1848). As Mark Girouard points out, of all the forces and agencies which spread the ideals of gentlemanly behaviour through the upper and middle classes, and provided a common code of behaviour and values, none was more important than the public school. For Cooke and his school friends being sent off to school at such a young age was an expected transition where one undertook training of “the brain, character and body” (Girouard 58).

In 1830 Cooke’s father sent him to Mr. Burton the vicar of Clipsham. Burton was a Senior Wrangler (mathematician) and was particularly qualified for preparing boys for the Army and Navy. Cooke was well equipped for his entry into the Royal Naval College, though he found Burton a hard task master.

There were no very vicious boys there but we never had a word except of dispraise from our master, and he received £130 a year each for drilling his miserable squad (Cooke 14).

In 1832, Cooke entered the Royal Naval College at Portsmouth and visited his Austen cousins:

Rice⁷ and myself used to go to our relation Admiral Francis Austen at Portsdown Hill and to his brother Captain Charles Austen at Gosport, occasionally. We were never allowed to go out of uniform and our uniform was shabby in the extreme. The Admiral and Captain Austen I mention were very unlike the other branch of Austens, our nearer relations in Kent, for they were very liberal, amiable and well read. They were own brothers to my beloved Jane Austen (Cooke 17).

Cooke was a youth of 13 years when he was enrolled at the Royal Naval College and would in all likelihood have embodied the ideals of early-nineteenth-century British masculinity, characterised by discipline, self-sacrifice and patriotic duty (Windholz 635) and the shaping and imagining of imperialist masculinities (Davin 137).

Cooke began his naval service as first midshipman on the *Portland*, stationed in the Mediterranean in 1834. It was during this period that he met Arthur Wakefield, then a First Lieutenant on the *Thunderer* (Stevens). Captain Arthur Wakefield (1799-1843) was the brother of Edward Gibbon Wakefield (1796- 1862), the architect of the New Zealand Company, which brought European settlers to the new colony in the mid 1800s (Stephens⁸, Temple 1).

⁷ Rice was Edward Bridges Rice, grandson of Edward Knight. Edward Knight was Jane Austen’s brother. He was adopted by his Knight relations, assumed their name and eventually inherited their estate (Stevens).

⁸ There are no page numbers in the online article by Joy Stephens.

Cooke's naval career ended in 1836 as a result of eye trouble and he applied for a commission in the infantry. After a period of living in Germany he was commissioned Ensign in the 53rd (Shropshire) Regiment, and took up duty at Naas, near Dublin, in early 1839 (Stevens). Some months later he was posted to Plymouth and became interested in the New Zealand Company's plans to create a new settlement, New Plymouth, on the west coast of the North Island of New Zealand:

I heard from Molesworth⁹ and Calmady¹⁰ a great deal about New Zealand in which they were very much interested and were forming a Company to purchase land and found a settlement to be called "New Plymouth". On my return to Plymouth I read all the books and obtained all the information I could of this wonderfully attractive colony. In short I was being bitten - colonially bitten - and the enthusiasm of Molesworth, whose next brother Francis was at Wellington and wrote extravagant terms of praise, began to tell upon me (Cooke 51).

Cooke was also determined to take himself off to New Zealand to repair a broken heart (Stevens). He had been very much in love with Charlotte Wingfield but she had been inconstant in her regard. His memoir reflects his disappointment in her:

Charlotte was such a born coquette that she would have fascinated a crossing sweeper had no other game presented itself. She had a peculiar charm about her that I never saw in any other woman, it would lead you back to her after all the tricks and falsehoods and treacheries she practiced on you. I never knew the like of her, and at this distance of time I feel my heart beat with the old exquisite mingling of great happiness and cruel doubt (Cooke 29).

Cooke's recollections of his infatuation with Charlotte Wingfield have clearly transformed her into the 'deceitful woman and wrecker of male lives' trope. What is also evident, though, is the cultural production of Victorian masculinity. Cooke appears to embody what Mariaconcetta Costantini refers to as the limits of traditional patriarchy (271). To be spurned in love would have been difficult for a man such as Cooke, who seems to have had an inordinate amount of vanity.

'Colonially Bitten'

On 25 March 1841 Cooke packed up his broken heart and sailed from Plymouth, England for New Zealand aboard the barque, the *Amelia Thompson*. There were 200 people on board, 187 passengers and 13 crew. He arrived in New Plymouth on 2 September 1841:

⁹ Sir William Molesworth, Bart. (1810 – 1855) (*Pencarrow*) was a Member of the West of England Board of the New Zealand Company (Settlement of New Plymouth).

¹⁰ Charles Biggs Calmady, Esq. (*Langdon Hall*) (1791 – 1855) was a Member of the West of England Board of the New Zealand Company (Settlement of New Plymouth).

We sailed in a detestable old ship, the *Amelia Thompson*, commanded by a worthy although choleric old Scots Highlander, Captain Dawson. Our passengers in the cabin were a motley lot. There were some uneducated, vulgar, quarrelsome Yorkshire men going out as Land agents. There was one gentleman besides myself, Captain Davy, a little Welshman and his son and his steward, a man named John Williams. The most gentlemanlike man was the steward, William Black. He was a famous cook and baker. The second class passengers I entirely forget. (53).

The five month journey aboard the *Amelia Thompson* must have been an anathema to Cooke. Jenny Jones, in her record of life on board the *London*, another emigrant ship which sailed to New Zealand in 1842, vividly pieces together the arduous voyage passengers faced. The stench of livestock and unwashed bodies, carcasses of beef and mutton hanging from the rigging, poor ventilation, few lavatories, battling inclement weather and coping with sickness and even death amongst the passengers (36).

Cooke's self-representation as an English gentleman located him as a man belonging to an elite social class with the economic means not to have to engage in trade (Harrison 207). Indeed, his genteel wealth and cultured upbringing had taught him to disdain the working classes. Nevertheless, 1841, in colonial Aotearoa New Zealand, was not a time to differentiate between the classes. When Cooke landed on the shores of New Plymouth, Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi) had been signed the year before and the Pākehā (European) settler population was no more than 2000 compared to at least 80,000 – 100,000 Māori (King 169). The settler population needed to work together to build a "Better Britain", the vision of New Zealand Company founder, Edward Gibbon Wakefield (King 170, Temple 133). For many of the Pākehā settlers, a "Better Britain" encapsulated the promise of prosperity and healthier environments and prospects for social advancement without the hurdles of a class system (Terruhn 4). Cooke certainly believed that New Zealand would prosper as a "better Britain".

Nature has pointed her out as the Great Britain of the south and with a population of the best Europeans, untainted by convict elements, it must be said that New Zealand will prosper faster than the continent of Australia (Cooke 92).

The settlers' aspiration to create a "better Britain" inevitably raised questions around relationality with Māori. The desire to assimilate Māori into the new settler nation became an important colonial aspiration as it was closely aligned with the acquisition of Māori land (Terruhn 4, Temple 131). Cooke, who was in many ways quite bohemian and liberal, nevertheless appeared to adhere to the idea of cultural assimilation and the colonial discourses on European racial superiority, paternalistic doctrines of protection, and discursive constructions of Māori as savage heathens.

There are far worse savages than our Māori cannibals, who had decency and in many ways a keen sense of honour and prosperity. Their code was not quite like ours I will grant. Married women or wahine tapu, who had their own husbands, amongst the heathens did not often break the 7th commandment, but as to unmarried women and widows, they never found any law against having a lover or two. Yet when these women took up and became the wife "Paramour" to a European without the ceremony they were true and faithful, and some of them industrious good house wives (Cooke 66).

Cooke's views on Māori women who took up with European men presumably included Ngapei Ngātata (c. 1811–1906) who became his common-law Māori wife. Cooke did not seem to view Māori via the stereo-types which, Lydia Wevers notes, frequently constructed them as lazy and childlike (205).

Soon after settling in New Plymouth, Cooke took up land at Te Hua and at Henui village, on the north-eastern edge of New Plymouth, and set about building a house (Stevens):

My house was of humble ascription consisting of a sitting room and two bed rooms and a kitchen some little distance in the rear house. Here I was visited by the Bishop of New Zealand, George Augustus Selwyn [1809–1878], a most delightful companion he was (Cooke 66).

Conflict between Māori and the new settlers, insistent on their rights to land they assumed had been purchased by the New Zealand Company, was occurring on both sides of Raukawamoana (Cook Strait) (Binney, O'Malley and Ward, 210). Unbeknownst to Cooke, he had selected land that had been reserved for the Puketapu hapu (subtribe) and this inevitably caused conflict. One incident occurred near Cooke's farm at the Hua. Puketapu hapu began cultivating an area selected by Cooke. George Clarke junior, the Assistant Protector of Aborigines, "remonstrated with them ... and pointed out two Native reserves at a short distance, which were much more adapted to their purpose." However, Puketapu hapu insisted they had a right to cultivate the land, and that it was with reluctance they interfered with Cooke (Boulton 67).

Eventually an agreement was made between the local tribe and Cooke, resulting in him being moved to an area which became known as Cooke's farm. To help cement this agreement he was offered Ngapei Ngātata to take as his wife, a Tatau Pounamu, signalling peace between the two cultures (Marsh 3).

Ngapei was the daughter of Ngatata i te rangi (1790-1854) an influential rangatira (chief) in the Ngati Te Whiti hapu (subtribe) of Te Atiawa iwi (tribe). He was a signatory of the Treaty of Waitangi and signed the Henry Williams version on 29 April 1840, aboard the schooner, Ariel, at Port Nicholson, Wellington (Orange 419). She also had a very influential brother, Wi Tako Ngatata (circa 1807–1887), who on 11 October 1872 became a member of the Legislative Council, the first Māori to hold a seat in the New Zealand Upper House. Cooke held his brother-in-law in high esteem and considered him a great friend.

The image of Ngapei aged in her late 70s, was probably painted around 1887, after the death of her brother Wi Tako, as her hair has been cropped suggesting she is mourning. The practice of women cutting hair as a symbol of grieving and mourning is often related to the myth of Taranga and her still-born son, Maui-potiki. She cut her hair and wrapped him in it and placed him in the ocean (Grace 40).



Ngapei Ngātata. Oil painting (26" × 20"). Artist unknown.
Image courtesy of Puke Ariki, New Plymouth, New Zealand.

Prior to Cooke being offered Ngapei Ngātata as a Tatau Pounamu the pair had already met:

When I left Wellington, to further my way up the coast, I came across Dicky Barrett, the old whaler of Taranaki, then a prosperous man. He had sold his hotel and he and his wife Rawhinia, a fine handsome Māori, two half-cast children and several natives accompanied us. At Waikanae two women, Ngapei and Patoma had followed us and the former took possession of me (Cooke 68)

Intimate relationships were often seen as a way of preventing misunderstandings between Māori and Pākehā (Bentley 218). However, such relationships could also unravel quite quickly and Māori women had a degree of autonomy where they could reject offers or negotiate conditions for “marriage” before committing to a partner (Wanhalla 16).

The description of Ngapei taking “possession” of Cooke is an interesting reversal of gender roles, underpinned with nineteenth-century racist overtones which constructed Māori women as being highly eroticised and sexualised. Cooke’s view of Māori women as being sexualised and sexually available is well documented in the *Reminiscences* with numerous descriptions of his sexual exploits. His conduct towards Māori women was also noted by other settlers. The Reverend Whitely, in a letter to Clarke the Protector of Aborigines, complained that Cooke had cohabited with at least four Māori women and then “set them adrift” when they became pregnant (Stevens).

Cooke made several excursions to Auckland and beyond. He describes travelling with Frederick Thatcher (1814 – 1890) a surveyor and architect, where they stayed at the Wesleyan mission and met John Whitely (1806 – 1869), “a kind and excellent man was the Wesleyan head - poor man after working most zealously amongst the natives for years he was murdered by some Mokau natives” (Cooke 71).

Eventually, after a long journey, Thatcher and Cooke arrived at Auckland and called on various friends. They planned to visit the first Chief Justice, William Martin (1841 – 1857) and Bishop George Augustus Selwyn, the first Anglican Bishop of New Zealand (1841 – 1858), but finding both were away they called on their wives:

We could only call on Mrs Sarah Selwyn [1809 – 1907] and Mrs Mary Martin [1817 – 1884] who were living near Auckland. We had tea there one night. Mrs Martin had wretched health and Mrs Selwyn was so cross and unpleasant I never repeated my visit (Cooke 74)

The Selwyns arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand in June 1842. Sarah had been used to living in the heart of English elite institutions and the move to the most distant of the British empire’s colonies had initially felt like being exiled (MacDonald 1). It was little wonder that Cooke and Thatcher found the two women “out of sorts”.

Soon after, Cooke visited the Catholic Bishop, Jean Baptiste François Pompallier (1801 – 1871) who kindly gave him passage on his brig to Tauranga.

I embarked with the good old Bishop, purple stockings, and gold crosses in sight and no doubt his crosier in his trunk. We had a very pleasant two days sail to Tauranga. The Bishop dined and fed me at his own table and with excellent “Vin de Bordeaux”. I took leave of my excellent Pompallier and his Priests with real regret (Cooke 75).

Cooke then set out for Rotorua where he “had heard such an account of the enchanting beauties of the district that he felt an urgency to visit” (Cooke, 75).

I had brought some barter goods, sugar, flour and salt, from Auckland and accompanied by Rotorua Natives I sallied forth one fine summers morning for Rotorua. We marched all day through this fine country and late in the evening at sunset, Rotorua Lake and its Island, Mokoia, burnt upon us in full beauty, The picturesque Mount Tarawera forming the background. We did not reach Ohinemutu until late and although I was very tired the Māori insisted upon me taking a warm bath in the pits filled with fresh running sulphureous hot water and then plunging into the cold water of the lake. They brought me cray fish, melons, hot potatoes, taro, kumara, and wild duck and eels for supper. After that I slept very well.

My life at Ohinemutu was rather like the “Lotus Eaters”, perfect idleness rising early and then luxuriating in these hot baths all perfectly bare of clothes. We had excursions in canoes to Mokoia and after a week to Tarawera Lake about seven miles away (Cooke 76).

Cooke’s blissful days at Ohinemutu came to an unexpected end when he discovered he was to be betrothed to a young Māori girl:

She was one of those strong powerful young girls with enormous limbs and bust and strong bushy black hair, her mouth and lips beautifully tattooed and the kind of woman the natives admire, quite young, only about 15 or 14 and to this damsel I was to be married (Cooke 77).

The “marriage” took place at Tarawera where Cooke and his bride were treated with the greatest respect before setting off for a night or two to look at Taupo and Rotomahana.

I saw the wonderful falls of Rotomahana where the hot water comes over the rock which it has worn away into terraces of lovely pink and white colours (Cooke 77).

Cooke saw the famous pink and white terraces well before the tourist trade of the 1870s and what was called the “vanishing horizon of authenticity” (Wevers 208). After his return to Ohinemutu, Cooke abruptly took his leave and made his way back to Taranaki:

The Natives fully believed that I was coming back. I was too glad to get away and bid my clucky bride a long and eternal farewell. I sent to Ohinemutu some “Taonga” blankets, and provisions and I dare say they were well satisfied (Cooke 77).

Alfred Nesbit Brown (1803-1884), the first archdeacon of Tauranga, wrote bitterly of the immoral conduct of Englishmen such as Cooke living in the Rotorua and Tauranga district, seeing them as wicked and setting “evil examples to the natives” (Wanhalla 28).

When Cooke returned to Taranaki he was welcomed back by Ngapei. He had been absent about three months and found matters not very much advanced. He continued to live at the Hua with Ngapei and spent time meeting up with other settlers. He was quite close to the Rev. William Bolland (1819-1847), the first minister for New Plymouth.

My dear mother wrote to me constantly and supplied me with books by every ship and our excellent parson Bolland had also a good supply of books. I often was at the parsonage and liked Bolland and his wife, Jane both, the more I saw them (Cooke 80).

Cooke’s military training in both the navy and army prepared him for hard physical activity and he was very fit and robust:

I had broken in 50 acres below my own land and sown it with wheat. By gracious permission of the Puketapu it lay between my farm and the sand hills. It was clean good land and averaged 30 baskets of wheat to the acre. The dwelling house which had been run up of a scantling [framework] filled in with sandstone and noggin [struts to increase the framework’s strength] occasionally had to be repaired and the earthquake or two drove down the walls and on one occasion the side of the house where Ngapei and I slept tumbled bodily outwards leaving us like the Irishman in the sedan chair without a bottom, only the honour and glory of a roof (Cooke 84).

Cooke's life in the antipodes continued with farming, family life and frequent trips to other parts of New Zealand. Towards the end of 1849 Cooke began to think of returning to England:

I began to hear from my mother, that she would like to see me as she was getting above 70 and as I was doing but little good for myself in New Zealand I thought nervously of returning home (Cooke 86).

Returning to England would mean leaving Ngapei and his two children behind, and Cooke records: "Poor little George Grey was born in 1848 and was therefore 3 years old when I left" (Cooke 86). No mention is made of his daughter.

I had a great mob of Māori to see me off. Poor old Ngapei and her family were in great distraught at my going. I saw the last of my beloved old mountain on the morning after we had got away and I trust I shall never forget the happy days I have spent under its friendly shadow (Cooke 86).

Cooke returned to England in 1851 and spent some time with his mother in Mayfair, London. He paid a round of visits to the relatives of New Zealand friends and delivered a letter in person to the author and illustrator, William Makepeace Thackeray (1811 – 1863), from Edward Jerningham Wakefield (1820 – 1879), son of Edward Gibbon Wakefield. He also met with Wakefield and the Canterbury Association and made a vain attempt to explain the realities of colonial life (Stevens). Cooke was now 32 years old and his life in London during this period was very much that of a 'man about town', socialising, attending the theatre and parties and meeting new and interesting people. Cooke introduced his friend Walter Baldock Durrant Mantell (1820 – 1895) to Geraldine Jewsbury in 1856. Geraldine was much taken with Mantell and he found her companionable and easy to talk to. After Mantell returned to New Zealand (in 1859) he and Geraldine corresponded for over twenty years. Their phenomenal literary exchange in the form of 500+ letters written between 1859 and 1880, the year Geraldine died, are archived in the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

In 1869 Cooke turned 50. He had married Margaret Townsend Ward (1837 – 1912) (widow of Crosbie Ward¹¹) in 1864. In a letter to Mantell, Geraldine Jewsbury noted: "he did not find it easy at first to be 'tied to his hearth and home,' having been 'so much of a Mormon in some respects'" (Jewsbury letters to Mantell).

Afterword

To reiterate, Cooke wrote his reminiscences in 1876. He had fled to Sweden having misappropriated funds from his social networks. Perpetrators of financial dishonesty were largely drawn from the cream of a very tightly configured social structure of which Cooke was a member (Wilson 1075). He was now 57 years old and the days of being "colonially bitten" were but a distant memory. Nevertheless, his memoir brings candid and authentic insights into early colonial life in New Zealand. Indeed, his reminiscences are remarkable for

¹¹ Crosbie Ward (1832–1867) was a Member of Parliament in Canterbury, New Zealand. He was born in County Down, Ireland and represented the Town of Lyttelton electorate from 1858 to 1866. He was a cabinet minister, Postmaster-General and Secretary for Crown Lands. He then represented the Avon electorate from 1866 to 1867, when he resigned. He was a prominent Christchurch journalist, editing the *Lyttelton Times*.

their very existence. They tell us a great deal about who he was and what he chose to reveal, considering the selective process of recollection.

Returning to Barclay's argument re the importance of acknowledging our emotional responses in archival research, I have, as she did, experienced the "affective tremor" of the archival encounter, as I've read through fragments of Cooke's life. In a letter to Geraldine Jewsbury, dated 13 September, 1876, and forwarded to Mantell, Maggie Cooke defends her husband, evoking that "affective tremor":

Dear old George is the most honourable man living but outsiders have got hold of him and I think he found he had slipped before he knew where he was. But how many do the same and suffer more even than he, for God has been very good to us for all his old friends have stuck to him even many that have lost much by him, dear old fellow how he has suffered no-one, but God knows (Jewsbury letters to Mantell).

Maggie Cooke wrote this letter soon after Cooke had taken refuge in Sweden. She was trying to make ends meet by offering board to young boys starting work in the city, and undertaking dress-making and knitting, all the while caring for her children and herself. Yet, without minimising her suffering, it is clear she loved him and forgave him, remaining loyal and steadfast.

As I have written this article on Cooke, I've become more sympathetic towards him and wondered if, like Barclay, I was "falling in love with the dead". I have developed greater empathy for him and more than a smidgen of fondness for this tupuna (ancestor), part rogue, part reprobate, but always a 'gentleman'. Certainly, I am grateful to his foresight in writing his memoir for his descendants to find and read and come to know a little more of our history and our collective selves.

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