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DEFENDING WELLINGTON - PUKE AHU

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Puke Ahu is a large hill dominating central Wellington, both physically and historically. Known today as Mount Cook, it has been a centre of occupation and action from the time of first human occupation of Te Whanganui ā Tara/Wellington. Both Māori and Pakeha recognised its strategic location and height.

The main structures on the hill today are owned and operated by Massey University. Massey are investigating ways to create a sense of physical, cultural and emotional identity in their campus. Mary O'Keeffe of Heritage Solutions



Figure 1: Location of Mount Cook, Wellington (marked by arrow)

was engaged to research the history of the site. The fascinating layers of history will be used to connect today's users of the site with its complex past, through physical signage, storyboards, art projects, exhibitions and other methods of connectivity.

1840 - Pre European occupation and the establishment of Wellington City

The name Puke Ahu was given by Ngai Tara, but its significance was not recorded (Adkin 1959: 69). It is not known exactly what the nature of the pre European Māori occupation on the hill was; whether there was an undefended kāinga or a defended pā on the hill.

One of the first plans of Wellington city, SO 10408 (1840) shows the area of Puke Ahu labelled as Cooks Mount. The hill was named for James Cook, and it was significant to the development of the early settlement as a survey trig was placed there. The 1840 survey plan notes the area of land as reserve no 10; it was one of the ten percent of Wellington's town acres intended to be set aside for Māori as "native reserves".

Early Europeans recognised the strategic advantage of the hill. The New Zealand Company surveyor Mein Smith, being a Royal Artilleryman, noted its military significance (Cooke 2006:1).

The Government Surveyor, Felton Matthew noted in 1841

"it appears to present many advantages for the military post, should such establishment every be required at Wellington, the ground is of moderate elevation, commanding a view of the whole town, airy and ease of access, having abundance of water at hand; easily defensible and having sufficient space for a very convenient parade ground".

(Cooke 2006:1)

It is prescient, given the subsequent history and use of the hill, that Matthew focuses on a proposed military use over any other commercial or recreational potential.

Matthew also suggested that any military barracks that might be needed should go on the summit of the hill, and also suggested a gaol on the southern boundary. These suggestions were subsequently approved by the Governor of New Zealand, William Hobson (Cooke 2006: 1).

The original landform of Mount Cook would have originally been much higher than present day: Peter Cooke notes "The hilltop was progressively levelled with each new building" (Cooke 2000: 97). This can also be seen in subsequent sketches and photos of the hill created through the late 19th century and into the 20th century.

1840-1848 - 1st prison

The first building of European function on the hill was a prison that was functioning by late 1840. (It is noted that the prison was established while the land was still a native reserve).

Ward records that by March 1842 there were "about sixty prisoners...at the Wellington gaol, chiefly mutinous or runaway sailors..." (Ward 1928: 106). The building at this time is described as "...a wretched Maori building, large enough for twelve or fifteen human beings at the most" (Ward 1928: 106). It is possible this was a building originally constructed as part of Puke Ahu kāinga or pā, and appropriated as a prison. The actual location of this structure on the hill is not known.

A more substantial prison building had been constructed by 1843; Ward refers to the "new" gaol in reference to a trial held in December 1843 (Ward 1928: 125). The "Colonial Government gaol" is described by Ward as a two storied brick building, with 18 inch walls (Ward 1928: 150).

Methven notes that the prison was intended to be a "truncated" version of the large Pentonville prison in London, held to be a model of an ideal modern prison. The Mt Cook prison was to be Y shaped, with a hall and administration offices, and the two three-storeyed wings containing 96 cells (Methven 2011: 20).

However only a two storeyed sixteen cell "stub" of one wing was actually constructed (Methven 2011: 20). The prison was built from bricks made by the prisoners at the adjacent brickworks.

The building was described in a report to the Resident Magistrate, William Shortland, in 1844

"....a prison wing 33 Feet 6 Inches long by 40 Feet wide and 23 feet 6 Inches in height from ground to the eaves of the building. It consists of two stories with 8 Cells in each Story, and a central hall running the whole length of the Building 10 feet wide and 21 feet high to the Ceiling at the upper end of which is a Staircase leading to a Gallery communicating with the Upper Cells."

(Methven 2011: 20-21)

Cooke notes that the intention had been for the prison to be at the south end of the Mt Cook summit, allowing the barracks to be at the more prominent northern end (Cooke 2006: 1); (this spatial arrangement would have placed the might of the military forces into the public view from the city to the north, and largely hidden the prisoners). However Cooke records that the Sherriff chose the location for the prison, and it ended up occupying more space on the hill summit than was anticipated, resulting in less room for the barracks (Cooke 2006: 2).

Ward records the prison was badly damaged in the 1848 earthquake, with the north and south gables thrown out, walls cracked in both stories, and the side walls cracked (Ward 1928: 150).

Methven records that the prison was repaired, and continued to be used to house short-term prisoners at the adjacent brickworks (Methven 2011: 22); (see below for discussion of the brickworks). Methven also notes that the prison was used into the 20th century, and was demolished in the 1920s for construction of the Dominion Museum.

1840s - 1st military phase

Cooke notes the first imperial troops were stationed at Mt Cook by July 1843, camping at the base of the hill in the area that is now Buckle Street, because their barracks on the hill were not complete.

The hill was "lightly palisaded to protect the southern flank of the town" against the perceived threat of Māori following the 1843 Wairau affray (Cooke 2009: 97).

Pressure from an influx of troops fighting at Pauatahanui and in the Hutt Valley in 1846 resulted in construction in 1847 of two temporary wooden barracks on the top of Mt Cook, along with a powder magazine on a small spur on the eastern flank of the hill just north of Ranfurly Street (Cooke, 2006: 2).

The stone and masonry powder magazine was described by Ward as a one story brick building, with 3ft wide walls, large buttresses all round, and 15 arches covered in solid masonry (Ward 1928: 150). The building also had stone foundations, as it too was damaged in the 1848 earthquake; Ward records the building being cracked in each gable and separated from the boundary wall, and cracked in the stone foundations on the north side (Ward 1928: 150).

A further influx of troops, including a permanent garrison of the 65th Regiment and Royal Engineers and Artillery, required more accommodation. More space was needed so the whole hill was set aside for military functions, and the two land parcels on Taranaki Street that were also intended as Māori reserves (Town Acres 89 & 90) were used for military accommodation.

The 1848 earthquake damaged the brick prison and the stone and brick powder magazine. After the 1848 earthquake Cooke records that four new barracks, out-houses and a guard house were built, this time in wood (Cooke 2006: 2). Construction in wood, not brick, was a major lesson learnt from the 1848 earthquake; it changed the architectural face of Wellington and was responsible for a relatively low loss of life in the much larger 1855 earthquake.

Cooke records that the first of two major excavations to lower the hill summit took place in 1848, when the hill was lowered by about 15 metres (45 feet at the time) (Cooke 2006: 2).

The hill summit was sketched by James Crawford in either 1846 or 1847, but prior to the lowering of the hill summit (Figure 2 and Figure 3).



Figure 2: Town of Wellington Port Nicholson N. Zealand [1846 or 1847?]. [Crawford, James Coutts] 1817-1889 :[Pencil sketches and watercolours of New Zealand 1839-1850]. Ref: A-229-043. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22825191>



Figure 3: Detail from Crawford as cited above. Reproduced with permission of the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

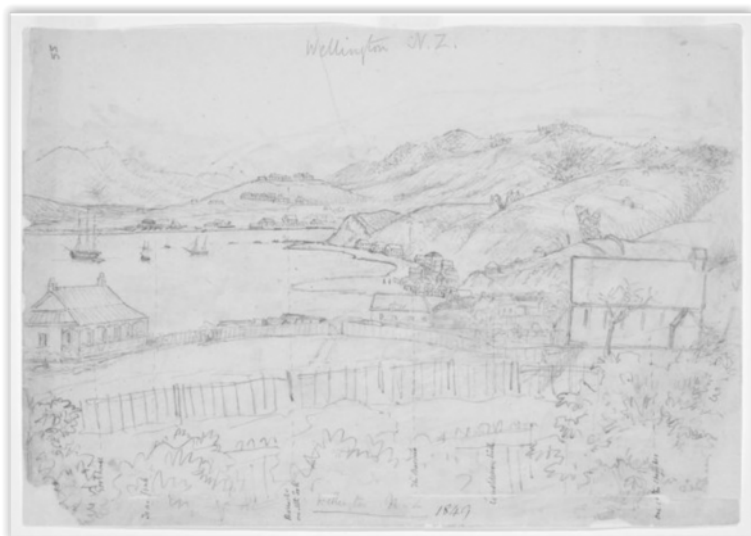


Figure 4: Wellington N. Z. 1849. Gov[ernmen]t House. Te Aro Pah. Barracks on Mount Cook. The Baron's. Constitution Hill. One of the churches. Collinson, Thomas Bernard 1822-1902: Seven years service on the borders of the Pacific Ocean, 1843-1850. Ref: A-292-071. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23070614>



Figure 5: Detail from Collinson as cited above. Reproduced with the permission of the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

The first wooden barracks building can be seen on the hilltop; the hill sits high above the Te Aro flat in the foreground.

The hill was sketched again, this time in 1849, after the hill had been lowered and more buildings had been constructed. This sketch by Thomas Collinson shows a large cluster of buildings on the hilltop.

Additional barracks and associated buildings had also been built along the western stretch of Buckle Street in front of the Mt Cook hill. It is probable that the cluster of buildings seen in Collinson's sketch on the slope of Mt Cook below the barracks on the summit is the Buckle Street barracks (Figures 4-5). Cooke notes that from 1847 the identifying terms of "upper Mt Cook barracks" and "lower Mt Cook barracks" were used to differentiate the two sites (Cooke 2006: 2).

A 1983 plan by Spyve shows the various buildings and structures on the hill by 1852 (reproduced in Cooke 2006: 1). Spyve notes this was as planned in about 1845 and largely what was built by 1852. The alignment of Buckle Street is notable: Buckle St was laid out to run in a straight line between Taranaki and Tasman Streets (as it does today). However Spyve shows it in two, non-aligned sections, with buildings and structures on the northwest corner of where the road now runs. It may be that was simply because the road was not physically formed in 1845, and buildings and structures were placed along what later became roadway.

1850s-1880s - 2nd military phase

Thirteen acres of Mt Cook was granted to the military in 1850, as seen on plan SO 10295, formalising its military status. This also included two land parcels on the northern side of Buckle Street, where the lower barracks had been constructed through the 1840s (see Figures 6-8).

New buildings were added through the 1870s and 1880s to the lower barracks site, located on Town Acre 90 on the corner of Taranaki and Buckle Streets, and on the two Town Acres on the northern side of Buckle Street (Cooke 2006: 3). Buildings added included drill halls, a gymnasium, a magazine guardhouse, and artillery depot.

Through the 1880s the lower barracks site was expanded for the New Zealand Constabulary force, formerly known as the AC or Armed Constabulary (Cooke 2006: 4). Thomas Ward's 1891 plan shows the various buildings on the Lower Barracks site.

The wooden barracks building in the upper barracks on Mt Cook was used as an immigrants' accommodation block from 1874 (Cooke 2006: 3). By the late 1870s they were being used as a temporary prison. Of particular significance is that the ploughmen from Parihaka were held there in 1879 (Te

Whiti and Titokowaru were not imprisoned at Mt Cook; they were at the Terrace Gaol).

A letter to the Minister of Native Affairs on the situation of the Māori prisoners was published in national papers on 15 August 1879. It noted the construction of a palisade around the prison building, and stated the "natives" were generally in good health.



Figure 6: Stock, Arthur Henry (Rev), 1823-1901. Te Aro, Wellington - Photograph taken by Reverend Arthur Henry Stock. Ref: 1/2-055704-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23157106>. 1858



Figure 7: Detail from Stock as cited above, showing the Upper Barracks. Reproduced with the permission of the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand



Figure 8: Detail from Stock as cited above, showing the Lower Barracks in the area of what is now Buckle Street. Detail reproduced with the permission of the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

The wooden upper barracks were emptied in 1892 because of an outbreak of typhoid. The site's drains and cesspits were cleaned out, as were the buildings, and the military men moved back in during 1893 (Cooke 2006: 5).

1883 - 2nd prison

Tenders were called for the construction of the second prison on the Mt Cook site in 1882 (Methven 2011: 67). This was intended to be a central "national" prison, in contrast to the Wellington prison on The Terrace.

The plans for the new prison were presented to Parliament in 1883. The building was planned to have six wings radiating from a circular central hall roofed with a dome.

Thomas Ward showed the intended layout of the prison in his 1891 plan of Wellington city (Figure 9). The intended outline of the building is seen as dotted lines, while the actual structure built is seen as the solid outline at the south end of the plan.

The prison was constructed from bricks made by Terrace gaol prisoners at the brickworks located on the southern part of the Mt Cook site (the brickworks had been established in the 1840s). Methven records the hill summit was lowered for the second time by 30 feet (10 metres) (Methven 2011: 67).

Construction work began in 1883 (O'Keeffe 2001: 15). A problem with brick supply meant that construction was sporadic (Methven records local brick suppliers objected to the prison brickworks' supply monopoly), and construction ceased in 1900 with only one wing and the lower stage of the central hall actually built (Methven 2011: 68).

The building never functioned as a prison. The proposal for its use as a prison was tremendously unpopular with Wellingtonians: numerous letters to the papers and newspaper articles decried the use of the site for such a purpose.

Terms such as "a carbuncle", "a monumental error" and "a frowning prison" were used to describe the building.

Various suggestions were made for alternate uses, including becoming a campus for the newly established Victoria University.

Figures 10-11, whilst taken when the building functioned as the subsequent Alexandra Barracks, demonstrate how visually dominant the building was, both through its elevated position and its sheer scale and mass.



Figure 9: Plan of proposed Mt Cook Prison, Thomas Ward Plan, 1881, Wellington City Council Archives



Figure 10: Alexandra Barracks, Mount Cook, Wellington. Negatives of the Evening Post newspaper. Ref: EP-3276-1/2-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.
<http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22798442>, c.1929 (southern view).



Figure 11: Overlooking Wellington, particularly the suburb of Mount Cook. Draffin, Michael: Photographs of New Zealand scenes. Ref: PAColl-0334-01. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.
<http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22760698>, c.1910.

3rd military phase 1899

In 1899 (during the Boer War) the Army took over the unused prison, and converted it into a military barracks (Cooke 2000:97). It was renamed in 1903 as the Alexandra Military Depot, but was commonly called the Alexandra Barracks (named for Alexandra, wife of King Edward VII, who took the throne in 1902).

The Alexandra Barracks and surrounding buildings at Mt Cook played a role during the 1931 maritime riots, acting as a base for the "Mounted Specials" (Cooke 2006: 6) (Figure 12).



Figure 12: Scene at Mount Cook Barracks, Wellington, during the 1913 waterfront strike, showing horses for the Mounted Special Police. Smith, Sydney Charles, 1888-1972 :Photographs of New Zealand. Ref: 1/1-019680-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22754726>

Brickworks

Part of the attraction of the Mt Cook site was the large deposit of clay at its southern end, suitable for making bricks. A brickworks was established by the early 1840s: the first brick prison on site and the later Alexandra Barracks were constructed from bricks made on the site.

The bricks from the prison brickyards have a distinctive arrow motif impressed in them, indicating their status as crown property (Figure 13). They are seen in many brick structures around Wellington.

After the prisoners left the Mt Cook prison and moved into the Terrace Gaol in the early 1850s they continued to march down to the brickworks to make bricks. Methven records that the brickworks produced 2.5 million bricks a year (Methven 2011:82).

The brickworks site and structures can be seen in plan SO 17327. This plan shows the brickworks were located at the southern part of the Mt Cook site.

The northern part of Mt Cook summit was used for military and law and order purposes, and the southern part for the brickworks.

Figure 14 shows detail of the brickworks structures, and shows the circular Hoffman kiln on site used to fire the bricks.

The Dominion reported in September 1919 that brickmaking at the site had ceased. The brickworks were demolished in the early 1920s for the construction of the Wellington Technical School.



Figure 13: Prison brick, wall at Government House, Wellington. Photo M. O'Keeffe, 2007.

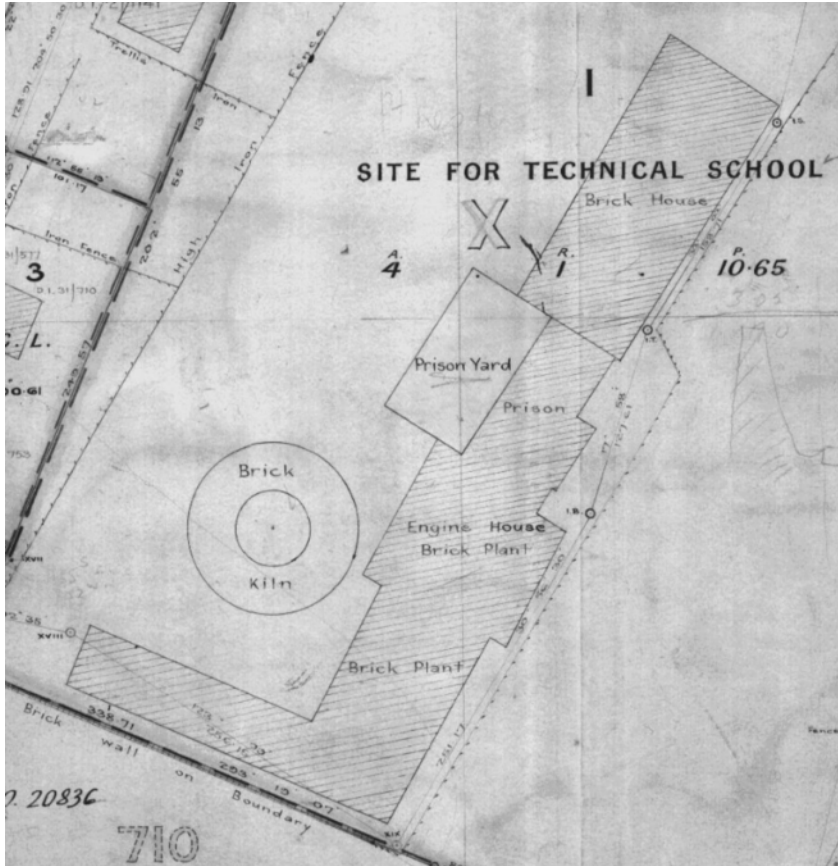


Figure 14: Detail of SO 17327

Education

The Wellington Technical School was constructed on the site of the brickworks, at the south end of Mount Cook, in 1922. The school had been founded in 1891 as the Wellington College of Design (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wellington_High_School_%28New_Zealand%29). Prior to the Mt Cook site the school was located on Mercer Street. It is now the Wellington High School, and shares the southern part of the Mt Cook campus with Massey University.



Figure 15: Scene at Mount Cook with Mount Cook Prison/Alexandra Barracks. McInnes, R: Negatives of the waterslide and the dam behind it at Days Bay, and Mount Cook prison. Ref: 1/2-066816-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22855721>, c.1882-1931.

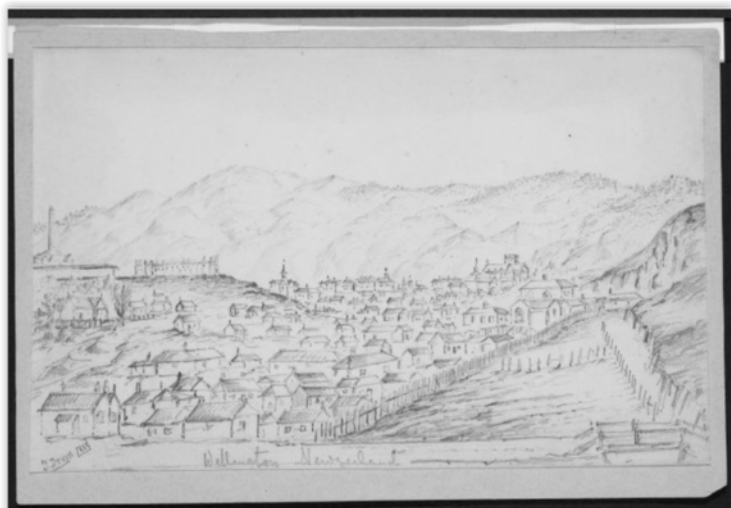


Figure 16: Drew, T, fl 1888 :Wellington New Zealand. 1888. Ref: A-303-019. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22332489>. Note Alexandra Barracks with brickworks chimney on left (far left of image).

The original school was located in a large grand three storied building, built in 1922 and demolished in 1985 (<http://www.whs.school.nz/about-us/history/>). Its focus was on applied trades and skills.

Dominion Museum

Many Wellingtonians had desired to see the Mt Cook site used for a more appropriate civic function than a prison or military barracks. A proposal for a new National Museum and Art Gallery had been suggested since the late 1920s, although the idea for a National War Memorial went back as far as 1919 (<http://www.mch.govt.nz/nz-identity-heritage/national-war-memorial/history>).

The Dominion Museum was built to replace the Colonial Museum, established in 1865 and sited in Museum Street behind Parliament.

Construction of a new National Museum and Art Gallery, and National War Memorial was recognised as an important national public building project. Therefore a national architectural competition was held in 1929, won by Auckland architecture firm, Gummer and Ford (<http://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/1409>).

Demolition of the Alexandra Barracks began in 1930.

The first structure of the major project to be built was the Carillon, completed by 1932. The Dominion Museum and National Art Gallery opened in 1936.

The museum and art gallery were closed to the public during World War Two, and the buildings were appropriated for defence purposes.

An 8-inch Armstrong gun formerly located in the Alexandra Barracks was deemed surplus from the military in 1920. The gun carriage was cut up for scrap but the 13 ton barrel was put up for sale but not sold. It was re-erected in front of the Alexandra Barracks on the Mt Cook hill, and, when the land was being prepared for the construction of the National Museum, was buried in situ on the hill slope in front of the museum in 1930 (Cooke 2000:97).

A series of emergency tunnels were dug into the Mt Cook site under the National Museum in 1942 during World War Two. They were designed to shelter Mt Cook residents and museum workers (Cooke 2001:724). There are four adits (entrances) opening onto Tasman Street below and three onto Taranaki Street, onto what is now the Wellington High School playing grounds. The tunnel complex remains largely intact below the former Museum building, and for a time was used as storage and conservation facilities by the Museum staff (O'Keeffe 2001: 18).

The building was taken over by Massey University in 1999.

Changing height of the hill

As noted, Mt Cook has been artificially lowered twice: first in 1848 just prior to the construction of the first wooden barracks, when it was lowered by 15 metres/45 feet, and again in 1883 for the construction of the brick Mt Cook prison/Alexandra Barracks, when the hill was lowered by about 10 metres/30 feet.

The total loss of height since the 1840s has been 25 metres/75 feet. The majority of fill from both demolition episodes appears to have been pushed north, onto the northern face of the hill descending to Buckle Street.

Archaeological investigations in 2013 prior to the construction of the cut and cover tunnel for Memorial Park, which has cut through the original line of Buckle Street, revealed archaeological structures from the 1880s beneath up to 4 metres of fill (Richard Shakles, personal communication to Mary O'Keeffe, December 2013).

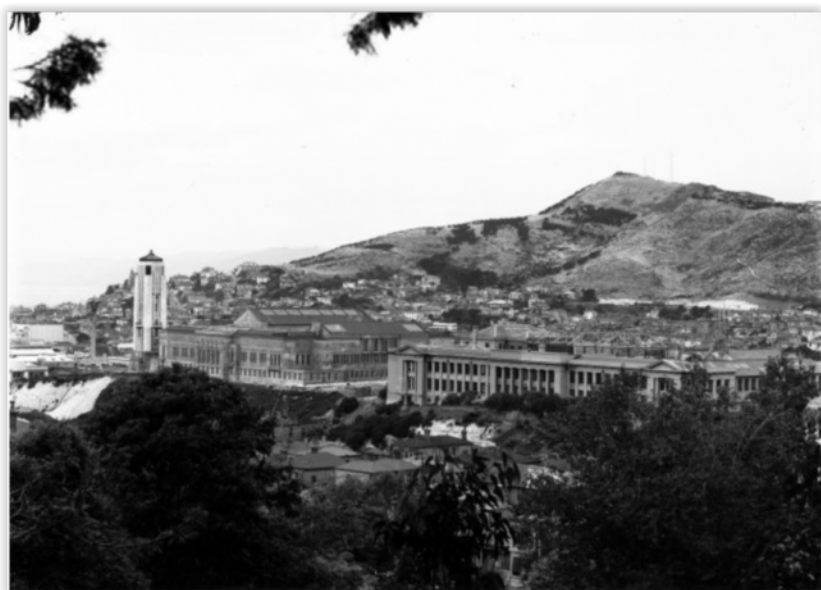


Figure 17: Raine, William Hall, 1892-1955. Looking over Wellington at Wellington High school, Carillon, Dominion Museum and National Art Gallery. New Zealand Free Lance: Photographic prints and negatives. Ref: 1/2-100833-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22904874>, c. 1936.

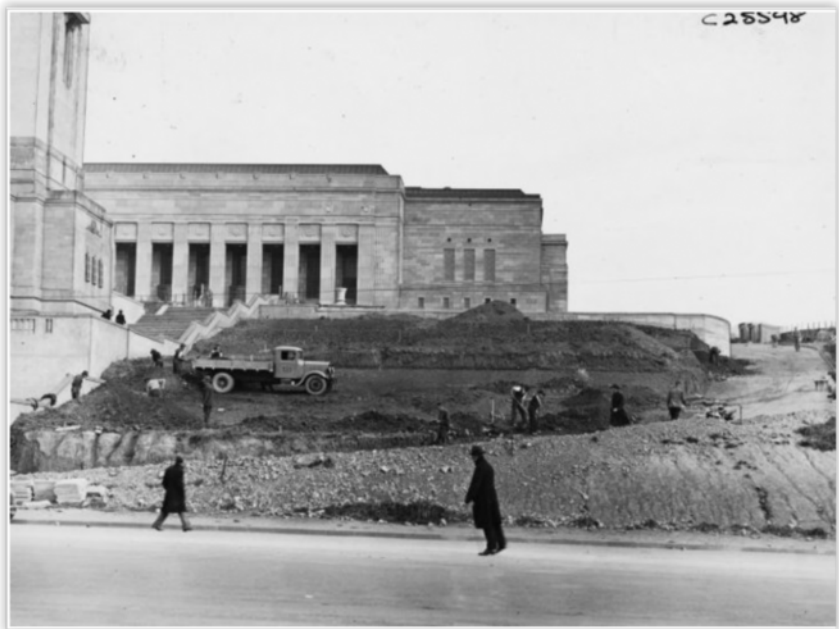


Figure 18: Grounds being laid out in front of the Dominion Museum, Wellington. Evening post (Newspaper. 1865-2002): Photographic negatives and prints of the Evening Post newspaper. Ref: PAColl-6301-35. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23063268>, 1936.

Images and photographs of the north face of Mt Cook taken at different times reveal the changing scale and nature of the slope.

Prior to the first excavation the hill was high and steep to the north, as seen in Figure 3 above.

A broadly similar view in 1849 shows the lower hill (Figure 5 above).

The lateral profiles of the hill can be compared in 1858 (Figure 8 above) and 1888 after the hill was lowered for the second time (Figure 15).

Mt Cook in 1913 (Figure 16) shows a broad gentle slope to Buckle Street, in contrast with the somewhat steeper slopes seen in earlier images.

Conclusions

From the time of first human occupation of Te Whanganui ā Tara/Wellington, Puke Ahu has been utilised for its strategic advantage. Its

height and dominating location over the city to the north meant it was an ideal location for activities of defence and law and order, with the accompanying implicit expression of imperial dominance and control.

The hill has variously been used for prisons, military garrisons, a centre of culture, and national memory. Its physical prominence has been matched by the national importance of its occupancy. It has an important place in both the history of Wellington City, and in New Zealand's military and cultural history.



Figure 19: Vicinity of Alexandra Barracks, Wellington. Smith, Sydney Charles, 1888-1972 :Photographs of New Zealand. Ref: 1/1-019679-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

<http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22743028>, c.1913.

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