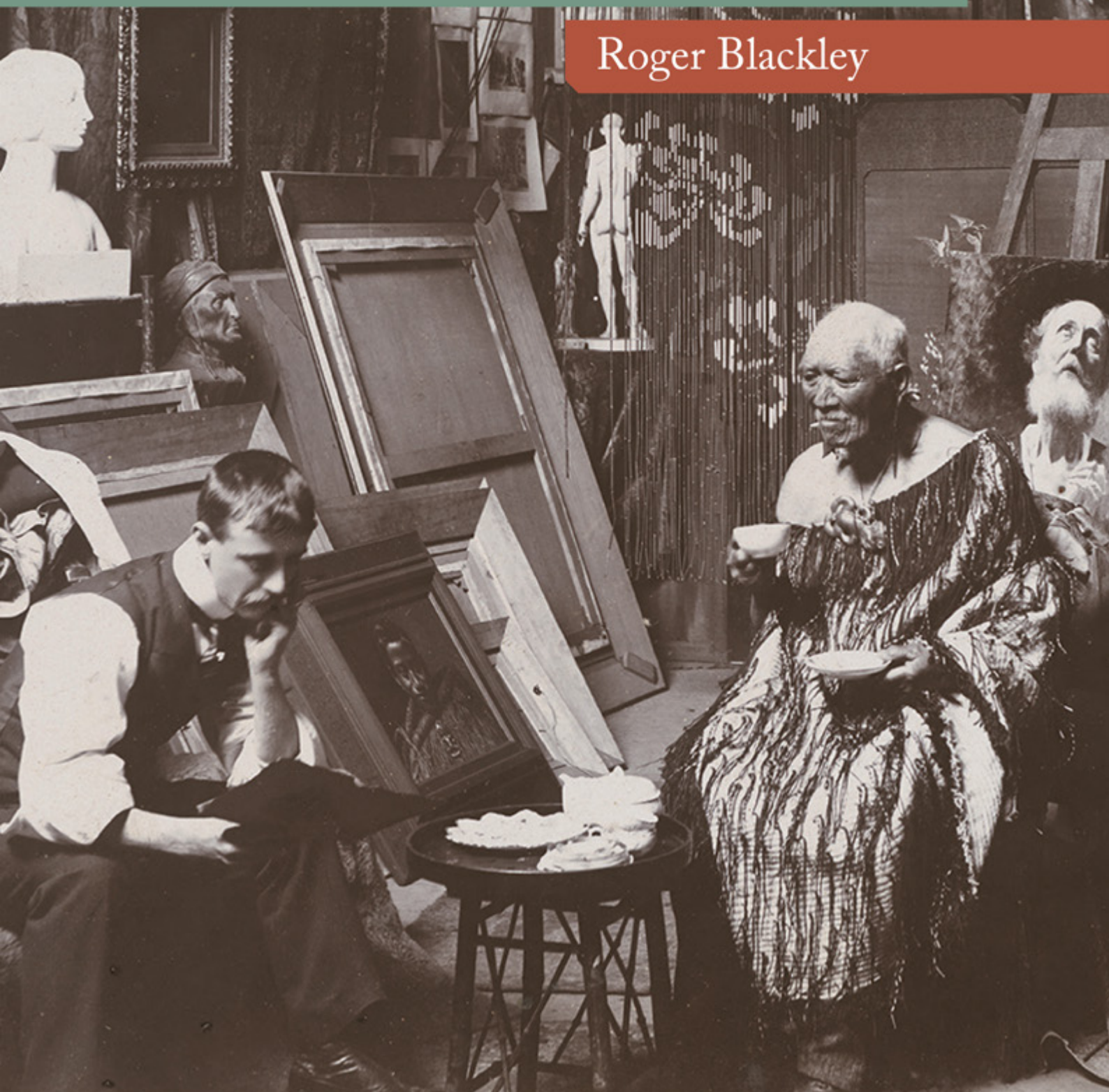


Galleries of Maoriland

Artists, Collectors and the Māori World, 1880–1910

Roger Blackley



Lindauer and Goldie, the Dominion Museum and the Polynesian Society: the story of artists and collectors engaging with the Māori world in turn-of-the-century New Zealand.

Galleries of Maoriland introduces us to the many ways in which Pākehā discovered, created, propagated and romanticised the Māori world at the turn of the century – in the paintings of Lindauer and Goldie; among artists, patrons, collectors and audiences, inside the Polynesian Society and the Dominion Museum, among stolen artefacts and fantastical accounts of the Māori past.

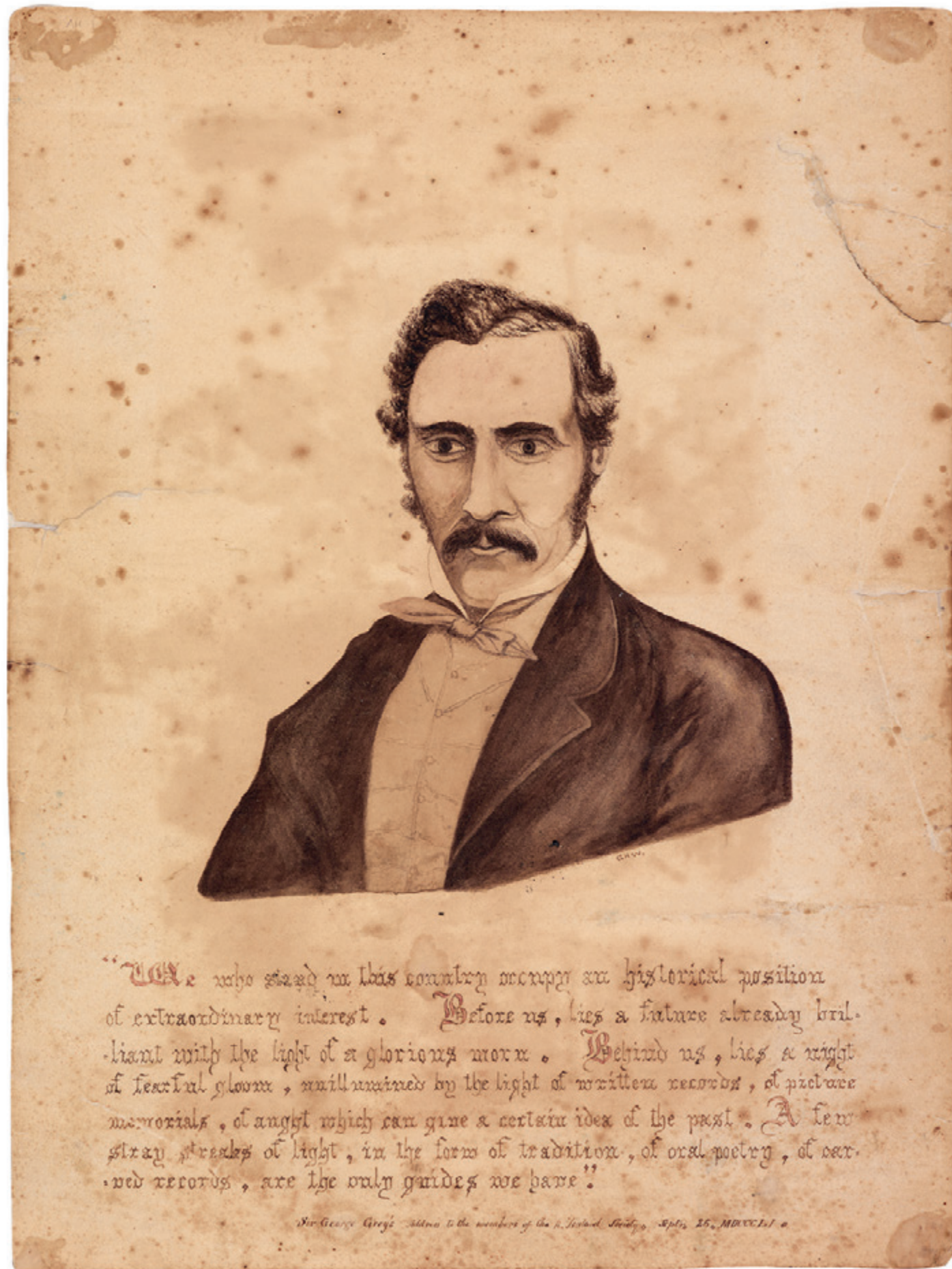
The culture of Maoriland was a Pākehā creation. But *Galleries of Maoriland* shows that Māori were not merely passive victims: they too had a stake in this process of romanticisation. What, this book asks, were some of the Māori purposes that were served by curio displays, portrait collections, and the wider ethnological culture? Why did the idealisation of an ancient Māori world, which obsessed ethnological inquirers and artists alike, appeal also to Māori? Who precisely were the Māori participants in this culture, and what were their motives?

Galleries of Maoriland looks at Māori prehistory in Pākehā art; the enthusiasm of Pākehā and Māori for portraiture and recreations of ancient life; the trade in Māori curios; and the international exhibition of this colonial culture. By illuminating New Zealand’s artistic and ethnographic economy at the turn of the twentieth century, this book provides a new understanding of our art and our culture.

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Introduction

REFERRING AS MUCH TO A PERIOD as a place, the term ‘Maoriland’ conjures New Zealand in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century – the so-called ‘late colonial’ era. During this period, more than in any other, colonial art and museology essentialised ‘traditional’ Māori culture and used it to help forge a distinctive Pākehā identity. *Galleries of Maoriland* introduces us to the many ways in which Pākehā discovered, created, propagated and romanticised the Māori world. During this period Māori material culture was avidly collected and exhibited as civic and national treasures, while Pākehā artists and savants turned their attentions to the intellectual colonisation of the Māori past. Galleries of heroic portraits of celebrated chiefs formed the colonial equivalent of national portrait galleries, while episodes from Māori history occupied pride of place in exhibitions staged by artists intent on forging a new ‘national’ art for the infant colony.

The culture of Maoriland was a Pākehā creation. But this book will argue that Māori were not merely passive victims but had a stake in this process of romanticisation. What, it asks, were some of the *Māori* purposes that were served by curio displays, portrait collections, and the wider ethnological culture? Why did the idealisation of an ancient Māori world, which obsessed ethnological enquirers and artists alike, appeal also to Māori? Who precisely were the Māori participants in this culture, and what were their motives? And what can a Māori reception of Pākehā art tell us? The inclusion of Māori as participants and agents in colonial art history serves to revise the long-standing emphasis on Māori as ethnographic and artistic *subjects*. By illuminating the artistic and ethnographic economy and critiquing the ways in which its history has been captured and re-presented, a more textured and balanced view of the transactions of the late-colonial art world becomes possible.

George Henry Wynyard,
Sir George Grey's Address to the members of the N Zealand Society Sept 26 MDCCCLXI, c. 1860, ink and wash on cardboard, 336 x 252 mm. ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY, A-164-003, PRESENTED BY MR A. H. R. GILLESPIE, 1960

Sir George Grey – ‘soldier, explorer, colonial governor, premier, scholar’ – was the godfather of ethnological collecting in New Zealand.¹ In a speech made to the New Zealand Society in 1851, Grey outlined the urgent task at hand:

We who stand in this country occupy an historical position of extraordinary interest. Before us, lies a future already brilliant with the light of a glorious morn, which we are to usher in to gladden unborn generations. Behind us, lies a night of fearful gloom, unilluminated by the light of written records, of picture memorials, of aught which can give a certain idea of the past. A few stray streaks of light, in the form of tradition, of oral poetry, of carved records, are the only guides we have. And, in the gloom of that night, are fast fading out of view, although dim outlines of them are still visible, some of the most fearful spectres which have ever stalked amongst mankind, in the hideous shapes of idolatry, human sacrifices, and cannibalism, – mixed up with which, in uncouth unison, was much of real poetry, and of actual grace of fancy. Future generations will almost doubt that such gloomy forms of thought have haunted their then highly-cultivated and civilized homes; or that a people, debased by such barbarities, could yet have felt and cherished so much of the poetic and good: and if they could then question us, who have seen these now fading superstitions ere they wholly vanished, what eager questions they would propose to us regarding their monstrous shapes, their horrid aspect, the rude and inharmonious voices with which, with horrid shouts and yells, their orgies were fulfilled! – How eagerly the poet, the painter, the sculptor, would seek to recover some traits of their terrible lineaments, – or of their softer outlines, when they related to scenes of the gentler passions, or of domestic life! – that either a stern grandeur, or the romantic glow of a primitive state of existence, might be imparted to some work of art.²

Grey’s two major collections of taonga were acquired largely as gifts from Māori chiefs and in turn presented to the British Museum and Auckland Art Gallery respectively. Grey also commissioned a number of paintings to memorialise key colonial events, such as the baptism of Te Āti Awa chief Hōniana Te Puni – the first steps towards realising the history painting tradition that he recommended in his 1851 speech.³ Another commission, a full-figure portrait of his equerry Hāmi Hōne Rōpiha, or John Hobbs, was prominently displayed in the drawing room of Grey’s mansion on Kawau Island, where Rōpiha looked down on the gracious surroundings that housed the carved and woven taonga and innumerable books, manuscripts and exotic curios.⁴

Grey outlined the purposes underlying such collecting in a famous passage from the preface to his *Polynesian Mythology* (1854):

I soon perceived that I could neither successfully govern, nor hope to conciliate, a numerous and turbulent people, with whose language, manners, customs, religion, and modes of thought I was quite unacquainted. . . . Although furnished with some very able interpreters, who gave

Daniel L. Mundy, *Maori Artifacts in Grey's Museum on Kawau Island, 1870–71*, albumen photograph, 285 x 232 mm. SIR GEORGE GREY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, AUCKLAND CITY LIBRARIES, PHOTOGRAPH ALBUM NO. 88





CHAPTER FIVE

The Curio Economy

WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR STUFF when you die? In the Māori world, it was common for ‘stuff’ to be consigned to the other world – the domain of the dead – through the institution of tapu. This is the process that unfolded at Maungakawa, the last residence of King Tāwhiao, who died there on 24 August 1894. Apart from occasional use for memorials to the dead monarch, Tāwhiao’s political and ceremonial centre near Cambridge was abandoned by his son, King Mahuta, in favour of a new centre at Waahi, near Huntly.¹ A 1905 account of a visit to the desolate ruins describes Pākehā adventurers evading surveillance and freely exploring the decaying houses, including examining the household property they still contained.² Rumour had it that the king’s body lay underneath the floor of his whare, or else in a secret burial place in nearby hills. According to the writer, following the burial on Taupiri ‘his people secretly removed his body to the hills and laid it away with their own weird ceremonies in a place unknown to the pakeha’. The king’s whare remained in good condition and, despite exposure to the elements, the intruders insisted that there was no sign of theft or vandalism. ‘Tawhiao is dust’, intoned the writer, ‘but his home is as he lived in it. The strange power of the tapu is on it.’

The great council house of the Kauhanganui, a Pākehā-type hall ornamented with Māori carvings, stood apart from the traditional whare. Silent and empty, it too had been abandoned, together with all its contents:

The dais at the end of the hall, where the king sat in state, is a curious mixture of Maori and European art. The front is ornamented with Maori carving, and looped across this is some tawdry drapery of pakeha manufacture; while on either side hang curtains of the same origin. In the centre of the dais is the king’s throne, and on a small table in front of it is his hat. Yes, the Maori chieftain wore a hat, and a grey bell-topper at that. It decidedly jars on one’s sense of the fitness of things, as does the iron safe down by the steps which lead up to the dais.

William Williams,
*Displays at the Hawke’s
Bay Philosophical Institute,
Napier*, c. 1888, scan from
dry-plate glass negative.
E. R. WILLIAMS COLLECTION,
ALEXANDER TURNBULL
LIBRARY, 1/1-25795-G

At the head of these same steps, on the wall, hangs King Tawhiao's sword-belt. Behind the throne hang two portraits, notably one in watercolour of the late Hone Heke. Opening out of the hall on one side are two rooms, in one of which is a printing press. Both, like the hall, are in a state of utmost confusion, and littered with papers. In the centre of the hall, suspended from the roof, is a table, which, like the table on the dais and like the floor, is strewn with documents and papers of every description.³

In addition to the image of Hōne Heke – presumably a depiction by Joseph Merrett of the famous rebel from the 1840s – the writer mentions ‘two portraits of Maori chiefs who, robed in flax mats, look solemnly down on the deserted, echoing hall, where the dust lies thick over everything’.

In February 1908 the abandoned pā of Maungakawa was engulfed in a bush fire lit by a neighbouring settler. King Tāwhiao's throne and crown, both ‘beautifully carved, the latter being inlaid with greenstone’, were reduced to ashes together with all the other relics.⁴ From the perspective of Augustus Hamilton and the ethnological preservationists, it was an unmitigated disaster. Newspapers throughout the Dominion ruefully reported that the guardians had recently refused an offer of £800 for the contents of the council house,

Thomas Pringle, *Puarawai o Te Arawa, Maori Hall, Auckland Museum*, c. 1905, scan from dry-plate glass negative. ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY, 1/1-7041-G



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