Joseph Harris Smallman: A prospector who became a Pakeha Maori

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Presenting a puzzle for historians is that neither Joseph Harris Smallman’s marriage in New Zealand nor the births of his children there were registered. Fortunately for historians, when he was imprisoned for drunkenness in February 1881 the police noted him as having been born in England 35 years previously. In November 1862 he married Sophia Spencer, who had been born at nearby Handsworth in 1843, in the Wesleyan Chapel at King’s Hill. In September 1863 their son Herbert Spencer was born and in July 1864, Smallman sailed to New Zealand to establish ‘a Mining business’, arriving there in October of that year. He had promised his wife ‘that as soon as he had formed the business’ his family would join him.

Prospecting at Thames

As Maori owned almost all the land in the Hauraki district (from Te Aroha to the end of the Coromandel peninsula), no prospecting could take place without their permission nor any mining without their receiving goldfield revenue. The principal owner of the land between the Hape and Karaka Creeks, part of the future Thames goldfield, was Wirope Hotere Taipari, a rangatira [chief] of Ngati Maru, who during the 1850s and 1860s permitted several Pakeha [Europeans] to prospect this land. Some Maori also prospected, usually surreptitiously, as most rangatira [chiefs] were firmly opposed to prospecting, for fear of Pakeha encroachment, a fear exacerbated by the Waikato War of 1863. Taipari ignored the opposition of his own hapu [sub-tribe], and, as he later
stated when seeking a reward for the discovery of gold, ‘did on all occasions aid and assist’ those he allowed to prospect.\textsuperscript{13} James Mackay, then Civil Commissioner for Hauraki, who would later become Taipari’s partner in a land agency,\textsuperscript{14} explained Taipari’s support for prospecting by his having been ‘greatly interested in the Nelson gold fields’ in the South Island. The amount of income he had obtained thereby is unknown, but it encouraged him to see the financial advantages, stressed by Mackay, of having his own goldfield.\textsuperscript{15} Mackay, who had been the mining warden at Nelson, had devised the arrangement that was repeated with modifications at Thames, whereby the Maori landowners received £1 for each miner’s right along with revenue from residence and business licenses and the felling of kauri trees.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{Figure 1: Taipari - Maori Chief at Thames [ca 1880s].}

\textsuperscript{13} Philip Hart
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\textsuperscript{16} Source: Kendrick Album, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, NZ. Reference no. PA1-o-249-17-1.
In 1864, Taipari showed gold found on his land to Mackay. That year Mackay was also informed by two Maori who had mined at Collingwood in the South Island that they had found gold near the future Karangahake field. The following March, Mackay selected Smallman and Walter Williamson to prospect on Taipari’s land, Taipari agreeing to provide ‘a large proportion’ of their food. Williamson who had mined alluvial gold in Victoria and had been a goldfields correspondence in Queensland also claimed familiarity with South Australian copper ore. Mackay mistakenly believed that Smallman also had alluvial experience in Australia, which could explain why he was selected. For a time two unnamed Pakeha assisted them and in late June they told Taipari of the ‘prospect of a payable goldfield on his land’, but in early July Williamson alone remained, and he was asked to leave at the end of August for fear of Pakeha being attracted to the district. They had been ‘most jealously watched by the other members of the tribe’ and brought back to Taipari’s land whenever they went outside its boundaries. In September and October, at the request of another rangatira, they prospected at Waiomu, further along the coast, but once more were unsuccessful because they were searching for alluvial gold when all the gold was contained in reefs.

After prospecting at Mercury Bay in March and April 1866, Williamson returned to Thames and found more traces of gold, but the press was unimpressed with yet another rumour of success. In July the following year, an editorial complained of ‘loafers sent down by subscriptions raised from Auckland citizens, to squat for three months at a time on Taipari’s land, eat his kumeras [sweet potatoes] and kill his pigs, and work one day a month’. This prompted Williamson, on behalf of himself and Smallman, to respond that all their supplies had been purchased from Maori, ‘with the exception of the kumeras which were freely given to us by the chief’. As Maori accompanied them ‘wherever we went’, they could not kill any pigs and their shafts and paddocks proved that they had worked in proximity to where Maori prospectors were currently exploring. They further stated that not ‘a single day was lost during six months unless through stress of weather’ and that they had not received any financial assistance.

At the beginning of May 1867, the Superintendent of the Auckland Province offered a reward of £5,000 for the discovery of a payable goldfield and a week later, Smallman told him that he ‘firmly’ believed there was payable alluvial gold on Taipari’s land and nearby. The reward also prompted Maori from Hauraki and the South Island to prospect. Taipari arranged for prospecting to be done by Paratene
Whakautu, who had been on several South Island fields, and Hamiora Kewa, a local man who had worked on one of these.33 When, after two months of searching, they found gold in late July, Taipari immediately showed their find to local officials and took samples to Auckland to show Mackay, who sent ten experienced Pakeha miners to test the ground. Once they confirmed that the find was likely to be payable, Mackay arranged for the proclamation of a goldfield.34

At Smallman’s suggestion, a public meeting was held in Auckland to devise ‘measures for opening up the auriferous country’.35 He attended the second such meeting, but left Williamson to describe their discovery.36 When the first party of miners went to Thames, he ‘navigated the steamer up the tortuous windings of the Kauaeranga Creek’ to the landing place.37 Nearly two years later, both men applied for the reward on the basis of being the first Pakeha to systematically prospect the district.38 Taipari’s rival bid described them ‘scratching like hens, and eating my pork’ until he became tired of providing it and they ‘left the district’.39 They did not receive a reward.

After Taipari obtained his goldfield, he made sure he prospered from it. He claimed that he had shown his Maori prospectors where to search, had provided them with timber for sluice boxes, and had told his relatives that if gold was found ‘they must be very strong to open up the land on account of the large Reward’. After being shown the samples ‘secretly’, he convinced Ngati Maru to allow his land to be opened for mining despite the opposition of the ‘large majority’.40 He received £300 as a reward, a sum that was also shared by the two Maori prospectors41 but received far more from goldfield revenue, which provided him with an average income of about £4,000 a year.42 On his death in 1897, he left an estate of £10,066 15s 11d.43 This income enabled Taipari to have a lavish lifestyle, spending £1,200 erecting a large dwelling house with all the latest fittings.44 In addition, his responsibilities as a rangatira meant that he divided some of the revenue amongst his hapu, and he met the costs of meetings, entertainments, and tangi [funerals].45 This income also met the cost, ‘nearly £2,000’, of the erection of Hotunui meeting house.46 The cost of his father’s tangi was about £1,000.47 For similar financial reasons, in 1880 Taipari went to Te Aroha to help convince Ngati Rahiri, the local hapu, to open a goldfield; afterwards he insisted that the government pay for his assistance.48

**Mining at Thames and Coromandel**

Immediately after the Thames goldfield was proclaimed on 30 July 1867, Williamson and Smallman started working a sluicing claim,49 for they still expected an alluvial
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field. They belonged to the first party to take up the Golden Crown claim, Williamson selling ‘his share before gold was struck on it’, and Smallman, so he claimed, being cheated out of his interest when the first bonanza was found. Smallman worked in several mines and traded in shares and was mine manager for one company whose lease expired because its survey was not completed - rather odd considering that he described himself as ‘Miner and Surveyor’. In 1870, when a tributer in the California mine, his ‘indomitable energy and pluck’ produced a profitable return.

In 1869, Smallman participated in another rush, at Coromandel, and mined there off and on for the next couple of years. In the early 1870s, he spent some time road making in the Rotorua district, where he was tricked into a partnership with an engineer who had shown him nuggets from a find that he was persuaded would produce from 20 to 30 ounces of gold a day. The area had no gold, but clearly he was still interested in prospecting unexplored areas.

A Pakeha Maori

Whilst prospecting at Thames, Smallman met a Pakeha Maori, William Nicholls. Pakeha Maori have been defined as ‘strangers turned into Maori’, who, until British rule was established in 1840, ‘had significant political, economic and social importance in tribal New Zealand’. After 1840, their role as ‘intermediaries between the races’ continued, but declined in importance. Increasingly, although these men married Maori women, formally or informally, sometimes lived in Maori communities, and adopted some Maori ways, they rarely ‘turned into Maori’, although the term ‘Pakeha Maori’ was still commonly used, often critically, because some were accused of exploiting their Maori connections for personal benefit. They were seen as lazy, living off their Maori relatives. In the mid- and late-nineteenth century, Pakeha Maori and their families absorbed elements of both cultures, usually resulting in their families ‘turning into Pakeha’ rather than the reverse, as can be illustrated by examining the lives of Pakeha Maori living in or near Te Aroha.

Nicholls, a Cornishman, had arrived in New Zealand in 1840, and two years later, when aged 24, he had married, under Maori custom, Hera (or Sarah) Te Whakaawa, a rangatira’s daughter. Their eldest child, Harete Te Whakaawa, otherwise Harriet or Charlotte (once ‘Charlotte Harriett’), would have two Pakeha husbands, while Hutana, or Susan, married an Englishman who had earlier fought against Maori in the New Zealand Wars. They farmed on her family’s land at Mangaiti, a few kilometres north
of Te Aroha. Wiremu Kerei, otherwise William Grey, married Rihitoto Mataia, who had a particularly distinguished whakapapa [ancestry]. He would be chairman of the Ohinemuri County Council for several years, and ended his life as a Legislative Councillor. Hera Kerei, otherwise Alice Grey, also married an Englishman who farmed on her family’s land in addition to being an interpreter, land purchase agent, and clerk distributing goldfield revenue to Maori landowners. Hemi, or James, Ponui, who married a Maori, also worked on the family farm.

In his early years in New Zealand, Nicholls had traded with Maori in the Waihou Valley (which includes the Te Aroha area), built schooners and a flax mill for them, and grazed cattle and sheep. In 1860, his eldest daughter married John Richard William Guilding, who had been born in New Zealand in 1842. Their two daughters would drown near their grandfather’s farm in 1872 while travelling to school in Auckland. During the early 1860s Guilding lived with Nicholls at one of his Waihou Valley trading stations, had other stores in the district, and shipped Maori produce to Auckland and Australian markets. In 1864, Taipari’s father and another rangatira gave him permission to erect a house and store at what would become Thames. Guilding later claimed to have seen gold there almost immediately, but ‘was not permitted to prospect’. When Williamson and Smallman prospected in the following year, he provided them with a pick, and possibly other assistance and Nicholls, described in 1867 as ‘one of the oldest residents in the Thames district’ converted his store into a hotel once the goldfield opened. By the beginning of the 1870s, Nicholls was farming at Paharakeke, now Mangaiti, near Te Aroha, with his younger son and his sons-in-law. His wife had inherited the land they farmed, along with other land in the district.

In ‘about 1868’, or so his descendants believed, Smallman married Harriet Guilding. There could be no legal marriage, just an arrangement under Maori custom, for both were already married. After his wife left him for Smallman, Guilding would sire seven more children with three other Maori women. In 1882 an official described Harete Te Whakaawa as ‘Mrs Guilding alias Mrs Smallman’. She was approximately the same age as Sophia Smallman. Although the births of Smallman’s children were not registered, school class lists and Mormon baptismal records show that between about 1869 and 1881 he had two sons and three daughters.

In 1873 or shortly afterwards, Smallman settled with his family at Paharakeke, where Harriet and three Maori owned 100 acres. In 1878, a Pakeha arrived at the ‘small settlement’ to be ‘welcomed on shore by a few native friends and the only white
settlement in that locality, Mr Joseph Smallman, the friend and mate of the late Walter Williamson’, who had died three years previously. In 1877, when the Crown was negotiating to purchase the Aroha Block, on the northern boundary of which he lived, Smallman responded to criticism of his being a ‘designing Pakeha-Maori’ who was trying to ‘raise the wind’ by selling land to speculators. He argued that ‘less bounce,’ less brandy, and more open dealings … with the real owners’ would have permitted Pakeha settlement and the mountains ‘would be belching forth their golden ore’. He advocated arrangements being made ‘quickly, fairly, and honestly’ with Maori and ‘a reasonable amount per acre’ offered, for ‘like ourselves’, they were ‘too fond of money to refuse it; present time with them is everything, the future they care very little for’. He condemned money being paid to other than the real owners, Ngati Rahiri, who, he believed were ‘fully alive to the advantages to be derived by the leasing of their lands’. He denied that ‘interested and designing’ Pakeha were ‘pocketing Maori landowners’ money and entrapping ‘unwily Europeans’ because there were ‘but two Europeans residing here’, himself and another Pakeha Maori. Smallman insisted that during his 15 years in New Zealand he had ‘not taken sixpence from Maori landowners or anxious speculators’. Three months later, his criticisms of press reports of disagreements amongst Ngati Rahiri rangatira over road making revealed his familiarity with their personalities and disputes.

Further Prospecting

In July 1878, it was reported that Smallman was about to prospect the King Country, a large area barred to Pakeha after the Waikato War. He had ‘an invitation signed by some of the principal’ landowners and was ‘personally acquainted with Te Heuheu’, paramount chief of Ngati Tuwharatoa, who was ‘favourable to his visit’. Smallman had been ‘rusticating with the Maoris in the Te Aroha for a few years past’, but was now keen to prospect ‘with the sanction and support of’ the landowners. He had prospected the King Country previously, at unrecorded dates, but as there was no gold to find, these searches were futile. This latest trip must have been very brief, for at the end of the following month he was reported to be ‘willing to act as postmaster’ at the Ngati Rahiri settlement near the future Te Aroha township.

In mid-October 1880, after gold had been found at Te Aroha but before the field was opened, a visiting journalist met ‘Joe Smallman’ with ‘a large party’ of Maori who had made a small find in an area upstream that was later proved to be barren.
Smallman pegged out claims so worthless that they were not registered, and with Maori partners acquired interests in the Tui portion of the field and probably supervised the working of their claims, but ceased to be involved in this duffer field after early 1881.95

Accused of murder
In February 1881, when living in a tent near the Tui claims,96 Smallman was accused by some Maori of being involved in the murder of Himiona Haira.97 Fortunately, he had the perfect alibi, being imprisoned at the time for being drunk.98 A local correspondent wrote that ‘Smallman, the well-known Pakeha Maori, has become so frightened at the threats’ that he had fled the district.99 This prompted Smallman, who had not fled but was fencing on his farm and preparing to harvest his crops, to deny these reports and to eulogize his own ‘spirit of enterprise’, which had even meant ‘jeopardising’ his life.

From the time I landed in this country to the present, I have always possessed an ardent desire to search after and bring to light its mineral wealth in those places which have hitherto [been] locked up against us, and have managed to explore into places where no other white man to the present day dare plant his foot,

- a reference to prospecting the King Country. ‘Twice in my expeditions I have been taken prisoner by the Maories (sic), and released again when they saw the advantages to be had by any discovery made on their territory’. If ‘the spirit of enterprise’ meant he was to be called a Pakeha Maori, he was ‘quite willing to accept’ this label.100 He remained on his farm and continued to visit Te Aroha,101 unmolested by relatives of the murdered man.

After 1881
Smallman was last included in an electoral roll in April 1885 as a ‘settler’ at Paharakeke,102 for he abandoned his family either later that year or in the next. When Harriet’s last child, Lillian Matilda, was born, either in 1886 or 1887, no father’s name was recorded apart from in one register where his name was first inscribed and then crossed out.103 Nevertheless, she always bore the surname Smallman.104 Harriet’s pregnancy to another man was either the cause or the consequence of Smallman leaving his second family. In March 1887, his eldest son was recorded as living ‘with his mother’ on the family farm.105 In 1891, it was proposed to erect a flag station on the railway line at ‘Mrs Smallman’s’.106 Clearly Smallman had long left the district. When
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Harriet, still a farmer, died in 1912, aged 68, Smallman was recorded as her only husband. Still a farmer, her obituary described her as ‘one of the oldest settlers in the district’.  

Smallman had returned to England, to be reunited with his legal wife and sole legitimate son. Why he was accepted back by Sophia is a mystery, for she knew of his liaison with Harriet. In 1880, she had told the divorce court that Smallman had written to her regularly until December 1870 but not again until January 1878, when he wrote that he ‘was coming home’. In the middle of the latter year, she had asked a cousin living at Thames for news of him and was informed ‘that my husband was living in the Bush … with a Half Caste woman the daughter of a Maori [written as Marie] Chief and that he had three children’. She wrote telling him what she had discovered but received no reply. During all the time he was away he had not ‘contributed either directly or indirectly one penny’ to support her and their son. She had had to earn her own income, friends had assisted financially, and she had inherited property, for which she obtained legal protection from Smallman. Her affidavit described his departure for New Zealand as ‘desertion’ without ‘any reasonable excuse’.

Sophia could have obtained a divorce on the grounds of desertion, but chose not to. Perhaps she expected him to return, as he had promised in 1878, and hoped that he would bring the profits from his mining investments, especially as in 1870 when ‘very ill’, he had sent her his will and mentioned that ‘he had a good interest in a Goldmine’. For whatever reason, despite his betrayal of his marriage vows, the 1891 census recorded them as living together. He was a mining engineer, his occupation for the rest of his working life. When the 1901 census was taken, they were visiting their son. Ten years later, they were living separately, probably because of his work. They later lived together until Smallman died at his Wednesbury home in 1925, aged 85, with his son ‘in attendance’. His widow died there late the following year.

Conclusion

Smallman was not a Pakeha Maori in the earlier sense, but by living amongst Maori and having part-Maori children he was labelled as such, and was happy to accept the label. His involvement with the local hapu meant that, when mining started at Te Aroha, he prospected only with Maori and was in charge of developing their claims. Unlike the other Pakeha Maori in the district, he abandoned his wife; or did she abandon him? Unlike the stereotypical Pakeha Maori, he did not live slothfully on the labour of his
Maori relatives; instead, like so many other miners, once mining declined he took whatever work was available. After building roads he became a farmer, typically also making occasional prospecting expeditions. His knowledge of the Maori language and of Maori ways encouraged him to discreetly explore areas forbidden to Pakeha, which saved him from ill treatment when discovered. As he had theoretical knowledge but no practical experience of prospecting, he was unsuccessful, looking for alluvial gold at Thames where none existed and, like everyone else at the time, not understanding that there was no gold in the King Country. As at Te Aroha, where Hone Werahiko found two goldfields, at Thames Maori proved to be more successful prospectors than Pakeha. Smallman earned money from mining for a time before making a living from small-scale farming, but probably returned to England with little if any money to show for having been away for over 20 years.

Endnotes

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