

David Burn and *The Maori Messenger*¹

ROSS HARVEY

The publication of government-sponsored newspapers and translations of the literature of the colonisers is acknowledged as a significant aspect of the colonising processes of the British Empire. The significance of such publications in New Zealand was certainly apparent in nineteenth-century New Zealand. In a paper with the telling subtitle “Translation and Colonial Acculturation in Victorian New Zealand”² Shef Rogers notes two examples: the translation into Maori of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* published in Wellington in 1852 and John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* in 1854.

This paper examines aspects of *The Maori Messenger*, a bilingual Maori–English newspaper published from 1849 to 1861 by the colonial government of New Zealand. It was intended, in the words of a contemporary commentator, to “keep the coloured population informed of the most important political and social events, as also *to tend to their civilization*.”³ *The Maori Messenger* should be distinguished from another newspaper with a very different purpose, the *New Zealand Government Gazette*, which was issued periodically from December 1840 to promulgate official proclamations and regulations, and from Maori-language newspapers published by missionary groups, whose principal purpose was to promote Christianity among the Maori people.

David Burn was associated with *The Maori Messenger*, which has the alternative Maori-language title *Te Karere Maori*, for almost all of its life. This paper gives a more accurate picture of the nature and extent of Burn’s activities and input into *The Maori Messenger* than has been drawn so far. It also focuses on the newspaper’s aim of nurturing a Maori population that would conform to the norms of the new colony and participate in its commercial life, and notes the extent of its success in achieving this aim. The sources on which this study is based include the report of a board of enquiry in 1856 into “the State of Native Affairs,” correspondence between Burn and government officials relating to his claims for payment in which he recounts in significant detail the nature of his activities, excerpts from

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² Shef Rogers, “Crusoe Among the Maori: Translation and Colonial Acculturation in Victorian New Zealand,” *Book History* 1 (1998): 182–95.

³ Karl Ritter von Scherzer, *Narrative of the Circumnavigation of the Globe by the Austrian Frigate, Novara ... in the Years 1857, 1858, & 1859* (London: Saunders, Otley, 1863), vol. 3, 152–53 footnote (italics added).

New Zealand Parliamentary debates, and letters to Governor Sir George Grey and others noting the reception and influence of *The Maori Messenger*. These sources are complemented by diaries of David Burn describing his activities in editing this newspaper and letters from Burn to his long-time correspondent Alexander Serle. These sources, together with statements in *The Maori Messenger* and in contemporary Auckland newspapers, allow us to develop a more accurate picture of the nature and extent of Burn's activities and input into *The Maori Messenger*.

Why is David Burn's role worth examining? Where his role has been noted at all by historians and bibliographers, Burn is mentioned as a minor player in the production of *The Maori Messenger*. This paper contends that, despite his lack of knowledge of the Maori language, Burn played a considerably more significant role in shaping the content and policy of the *Maori Messenger* than has been attributed to him and he, therefore, has a greater share of responsibility for its influence as a government instrument of colonisation and subjugation of Maori. The view most commonly promulgated has been that content for *The Maori Messenger* was supplied by the Native Secretaries, who were government officials,⁴ a view that appears not to have been informed either by documents in the Colonial Secretary's papers held at Archives New Zealand⁵ or by two extant volumes of Burn's diaries held in the State Library of New South Wales.⁶

No account of *The Maori Messenger* can be complete without some consideration of the role of Sir George Grey in establishing and publishing the newspaper. Grey was Governor of the colony of New Zealand twice, after serving as a military officer in Ireland and as Governor of the colony of South Australia. His first tenure as Governor of New Zealand was from 1845 to 1853 and his second from 1861 to 1868; in between these two terms Grey was Governor of the Cape Colony in southern Africa.

Grey's early interest in the cultures of indigenous peoples predated his first appointment as Governor of New Zealand, having been stimulated by his explorations in northwestern Australia in 1837 and 1839. He collected philological materials and learned the languages of the peoples in the colonies he governed. Donald Kerr, one of Grey's biographers, suggests that Grey "obviously enjoyed the intellectual stimulation derived from learning a language" and was well aware of

⁴ An expression of this view can be found in Jenifer Curnow's "A Brief History of Maori-Language Newspapers," in *Rere Atu, Taku Manu! Discovering History, Language and Politics in the Maori-Language Newspapers*, ed. Jenifer Curnow, Ngapare Hopa, and Jane McRae (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2002), 17–41.

⁵ The principal source at Archives New Zealand is IA 1, 1861/2131, which documents Burn's involvement with *The Maori Messenger* from its inception in 1848 to 1861, when Burn took a claim for unpaid salary to the Private Grievance Committee of the New Zealand House of Representatives.

⁶ David Burn, Diaries, 1 May 1850–31 Dec. 1851; 10 Oct. 1855–15 Sept. 1858. State Library of New South Wales, B191–B192 (Microfilm CY1094). Further references to the diaries are by date.

the political benefits of his interest in the languages of the colonised.⁷ Kerr also notes that Grey, arising from his “desire for direct, uncluttered communication, felt it was his duty to become acquainted, with the least possible delay, with their vocabulary, manners, customs, and prejudices.”⁸ Grey wrote in the preface to his *Polynesian Mythology*, a collection of Maori myths and legends, that he 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.”⁹ He noted that in their speech and writings to him Maori chiefs “frequently quoted, in explanation of their views or intentions, fragments of ancient poems or proverbs, or made allusions which rested on an ancient system of mythology; and although it was clear that the most important parts of their communications were embodied in these figurative forms, the interpreters were quite at fault, they could rarely (if ever) translate the poems or explain the allusions.”¹⁰

Other factors also influenced Grey’s establishment of a Maori-language newspaper. His approach to governing Maori was to adopt “amalgamation policies” that he hoped would over time “close the gap between Maori and settler and improve the chances of representative government succeeding;”¹¹ *The Maori Messenger* can undoubtedly be explained from this perspective. Also considered should be the larger context of imperial intent. Stafford and Williams note Thomas Richards’s view of “the project of empire as the collection of knowledge, of the business of empire as the control and ordering of a multitude of facts.”¹² There was, they suggest, a sense in which capturing indigenous knowledge in text accords “a participatory role within the text, and thus in the historical sequences.” They claim the textualisation of traditions to be “in effect a demonstration that indigenous traditions have a place within the discourse. Once the indigenous people were located in the textual world as participants, and their traditions were accorded status within the discourse, they could not be erased.”¹³

Grey’s interest in reviving *The Maori Messenger* in 1849 (an earlier Maori-language newspaper published from 1842 to 1846 was closed by Grey, perhaps

⁷ Donald Kerr, *Amassing Treasures for All Times: Sir George Grey, Colonial Bookman and Collector* (New Castle, Delaware: Oak Knoll Press; Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2006), 114.

⁸ Kerr, *Amassing Treasures*, 75.

⁹ Sir George Grey, *Polynesian Mythology and Ancient Traditional History of the New Zealand Race* (London: John Murray, 1855), iii.

¹⁰ Grey, *Polynesian Mythology*, vii.

¹¹ Julie Evans, *Edward Eyre, Race and Colonial Governance* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2005), 65.

¹² Jane Stafford and Mark Williams, *Maoriland: New Zealand Literature 1872–1914* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2006), 44.

¹³ Stafford and Williams, *Maoriland*, 45.

because he did not have legal redress against newspaper editors critical of him¹⁴) and supporting it thereafter can be more easily understood in the context of his amalgamation policies and in the broader interpretation of the textualisation of traditions. Both of these help to strengthen the modern reader's understanding of much of the content published in the newspaper.

The Maori Messenger (Te Karere Maori) 1849–1861

Governor Grey established the Maori–English newspaper *The Maori Messenger – Te Karere Maori* in 1849 as a means of communication between colonists in New Zealand and the Maori population, and as a tool in the religious and cultural indoctrination of the colonised population. The newspaper contained pieces on religious, political and literary topics, articles on practical matters such as advice about horticulture and sheep farming, prices current, and economic topics (for example, the disadvantages of debt and the advantages of savings banks). Closely associated with the newspaper from its inception until 1860 was David Burn, a professional editor and journalist who, despite his lack of knowledge of the Maori language, was a major player in shaping *The Maori Messenger*. In his hands the newspaper was an influential government instrument of colonisation, aimed at “the diffusion of useful knowledge among the natives.”¹⁵ Implicit in this aim, according to Burn, was the instruction of Maori in “the rural, commercial, and manifold industrial arts of life”¹⁶ so they could participate in the commercial life of the developing colony. Burn brought to the task “a determination to spare no effort to cull materials, whether original or select, the best calculated to elevate and enlighten the native understanding, and to render the Maori a fit and civilized associate of his English fellow subject.”¹⁷

The Maori Messenger was not the first Maori-language newspaper to be published by the New Zealand Government. Its precedent was *Te Karere o Niu Tirenī* whose forty-nine issues were published in Auckland from 1 January 1842 to 15 January 1846. The lineage of *The Maori Messenger* and the earlier and future publications is as follows: *Te Karere o Niu Tirenī* 1842–1846 (monthly); *The Maori Messenger – Te Karere Maori* 1849–1854 (fortnightly), 1855–1861 (monthly

¹⁴ Evans, *Edward Eyre*, 78–79; Curnow (“A Brief History,” 18) surmises that the cost of the war in the Bay of Islands probably meant that government resources were strained and administrative expenditure needed to be cut.

¹⁵ British Parliamentary Papers “Report of a Board Appointed by His Excellency the Governor to Enquire into and Report upon the State of Native Affairs.” In “New Zealand: Copies or Extracts of Despatches from the Governor of New Zealand, relating to the Management of Native Affairs and the Purchase of Native Land....” [British] House of Commons. *Accounts and Papers, Session 24 January–28 August 1860*, vol. XLIV, Paper no. 492 (BPP 1860 (492)), 97.

¹⁶ David Burn to Thomas H. Smith Esquire, Assistant Native Secretary, October 24, 1860, Archives New Zealand, IA 1, 1861/2131.

¹⁷ *The Maori Messenger*, January 4, 1849, 1, column 3.

It has been deemed advisable, not to restrict the translators to a literal interpretation of the English text; but to permit a free construction of the several papers, in a manner suited to the peculiarities of the native idiomism. The sense and substance of every article will, however, be carefully preserved, and the articles be presented to the Maori, in a guise to which the Editor neither pretends nor aspires. By this arrangement, it is hoped that solid instruction to the native, may be blent with agreeable information to the English reader.

THE MAORI MESSENGER.

AUCKLAND, JANUARY 4, 1849.

It has been said, and truly said—nothing in life more difficult than a beginning! If difficult in ordinary affairs, it must be yet infinitely more so in literary matters, where so much of after success is dependent upon a favourable first impression. But if difficulty be enhanced in the case of the common routine of literary adventure, where the words written and the sentiments expressed, are addressed to the sympathies and the understandings of men of the same nation, the same education, the same habit of thought, and the same standing in the scale of civilization:—if it be difficult to make a beginning with these, how incomparably more arduous must it not be to adapt one's powers to afford instruction and amusement to a strange people, scarcely across the threshold of barbarism.

We feel that difficulty, and we feel it keenly:—not in a craven spirit, but with an earnest and an anxious desire to address our energies to the beneficial surmounting of the task we have undertaken. And we are cheered to a hope of successful issue to our career when we consider the goodly array of able volunteers who have already proffered their generous aid to speed THE MESSENGER on his humanizing way.

Although we cannot but remember that a previous journal, THE MAORI GAZETTE, conducted by those much more conversant with native customs and habits than we, proved of comparative inutilty. Although we have recently beheld another journal, partly devoted

to native culture, retire from an unproductive field. Although such discomfitures are calculated to make us doubt, they do not, nevertheless, lead us to despond; and that from no presumptuous reliance upon ourselves, but simply because we are led to reckon upon a more extensive and better organized machinery; such as will lighten our own individual labours, rendering us, in very deed, more the editor than the contributor.

We bring to the task, in which we this day adventure, an inquiring and an unprejudiced spirit—a determination to spare no effort to cull materials, whether original or select, the best calculated to elevate and enlighten the native understanding, and to render the Maori a fit and civilized associate of his English fellow subject. To attainment of that most desirable end, all our endeavours shall point. And to do so effectually—to hit the moral target aimed at—writings of every shade and grade shall be scanned with a careful eye and pondered with a diligent heart; so that no untoward offering, no unseemly blemish, no discrepancy in tone or temper, may creep in to impair that harmonious whole we shall strive so earnestly to accomplish.

TE KARERE MAORI.

AKARANA, HANUERE 4, 1849.

E MEINGA ana, (a, he pono taua meatanga) kahore he mea hei whai i te timatanga, te pakeke. Me he mea e pakeke ana te timatanga o nga mea noa ake nei, poka ke ake te pakake ua tangotango te whakaaro ki nga tikanga rere ke; no te mea hoki, ekore ana tikanga ke e kahu, ki te mea kihai i ahua pai i te tukunga atu ki te tangata.

Na, me he mea, he mahi uaua te tuku tikanga o tetahi Iwi ki ehinu ano o ratou, ina rite tahi te reo, nga whakaaro, nga tikanga, me te matauranga—me he mea, e uaua ana tenei, ekore ianei e uaua noa ake, te mahi ako i te Iwi orokomaea mai i te kuwaretanga?

Kihai tenei mahi uaua i ngaro i ta matou titiro—otia, ekore matakuhia te pakeke o taua mahi. Ka whakaputaina o matou ngoi kia taea ai tenei mahi, kua rangahia nei e o matou ngakau. E mama ana o matou whakaaro ua ahu te titiro, ki te tukunga iho o te

Figure 1: Excerpt from
the first issue of
The Maori Messenger,
January 4, 1849.

to April 1857, then fortnightly); *Te Manubiri Tuarangi and Maori Intelligencer* 1861 (fortnightly); *Te Karere Maori or Maori Messenger* 1861–1863 (monthly).¹⁸

Jenifer Curnow suggests three phases of Maori-language newspaper history, the first (and the one that concerns us in this paper) from 1842 to 1862 comprising newspapers “published by government for colonizing purposes (albeit with a component of contemporary philanthropy).”¹⁹ *Te Karere o Niu Tireni* (1842–1846) had the aim of informing Maori about “the laws and customs of the Pakeha” and the Pakeha about “the customs of the Maori.”²⁰ Publication of *Te Karere o Niu Tireni* was halted after the January 1846 issue without public explanation.

The Maori Messenger – Te Karere Maori succeeded *Te Karere o Niu Tireni* three years after its demise, its first number being published on 1 January 1849. It was issued fortnightly until May 1854, and, after a seven-month hiatus, monthly from January 1855 until it reverted to fortnightly publication in May 1857. Curnow has indicated that material for *The Maori Messenger* was supplied by the Native Secretaries and was probably edited by C. O. B. Davis,²¹ also a government official. This view has also been adopted by Paterson.²² Davis had been appointed to the government’s Office of the Protectorate of Aborigines in Auckland as a clerk and interpreter in 1842 and remained in that position when the Native Secretary’s department was established in 1846. Ward, author of the entry for Davis in the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, provides a less specific but probably more accurate statement of Davis’s role in *The Maori Messenger*.²³ The bibliographer Dr. Hocken claimed in 1909 that in the early years of *The Maori Messenger* “it was partly edited by Mr. David Burn” and that, after the hiatus in its publication in 1854 and its resumption in 1855, “Mr. C. O. Davis was the first and principal editor, then Mr. D. Burn. Mr. Walter Buller also edited for some time.”²⁴

None of the statements about the editorship of *The Maori Messenger* appear to have been informed either by the significant number of documents about its operation that are to be found in the Colonial Secretary’s papers at Archives New

¹⁸ Derived from P. Parkinson and P. Griffith, *Books in Maori, 1815–1900: An Annotated Bibliography* (Auckland: Reed, 2004). Parkinson and Griffith consider *The Maori Messenger* to be two newspapers (entries S3, S5). Contemporary views considered it as a single title, an interpretation followed in this paper.

¹⁹ Curnow, “A Brief History,” 17.

²⁰ Curnow, “A Brief History,” 18.

²¹ Curnow, “A Brief History,” 18.

²² Lachy Paterson, *Colonial Discourses: Niupepa Maori 1855–1863* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2006), 20.

²³ Alan Ward, “Davis, Charles Oliver Bond 1817/1818?–1887,” in *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 1 September 2010, accessed July 30, 2011, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/1d3/1>.

²⁴ T. M. Hocken, *A Bibliography of the Literature Relating to New Zealand* (Wellington: Government Printer, 1909), 96

Zealand, or by Burn's own account of his activities in his diaries. Burn reflected in a letter in 1854 that he "applied for and obtained the assistance of Mr. C. O. Davis" with translation because he had encountered "lukewarmness if not antagonism to the Journal, lurking in the minds of early translators."²⁵ Davis stated that "he was verbally authorised by Major Nugent to take the management of the Native Paper," probably in 1855.²⁶ Burn energetically complained in a diary entry for 11 January 1856 of "the usurpation of my duties" by Davis who was "extremely insolent." The questions of who edited *The Maori Messenger*, and what roles the editor performed, are taken up again later in this paper.

David Burn

David Burn (1798-1875) arrived in Auckland in the 1840s from Tasmania, where he had edited the *South Britain or Tasmanian Literary Journal*. He worked on the *Southern Cross*, the *New-Zealander*, the *Auckland Register* and the *New Zealand Herald*, of which he was briefly a co-proprietor, and he also played a key role in the *Maori Messenger*.

David Burn's life is remarkable in many respects and is worth recounting here.²⁷ He was born in Edinburgh on 17 December 1798. After a brief period in the Royal Navy,²⁸ during which he visited southern seas on board HMS *Calliope*,²⁹ "indifferent health induced him to emigrate to Australia."³⁰ He arrived in Hobart with a daughter in May 1826, following his mother Jacobina Burn, who was the first woman to be granted land in Van Diemen's Land. Burn returned to Edinburgh in 1829 "where he divorced his wife Frances Maria, née Eldred" and where his play "The Bushrangers" (the first Australian play to be performed on stage) was performed at the Caledonian Theatre in September of that year.³¹ By November 1830 he was back in Hobart where he purchased land and on 6 November 1832 he married Catherine Fenton. Another visit to the United Kingdom is recorded in 1836 and again in 1840 when he addressed the Colonial

²⁵ David Burn to Major Nugent, Native Secretary, April 15, 1854. Archives New Zealand, IA 1, 1861/2131.

²⁶ H. T. Kemp, Acting Native Secretary, January 22, 1855, annotation to letter from David Burn. Archives New Zealand, IA 1, 1861/2131.

²⁷ The standard accounts of Burn's life are: D. H. Borchardt, "Burn, David (1799-1875)," in *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1966), vol. 1, 181-82; E. Morris Miller, *Pressmen and Governors: Australian Editors and Writers in Early Tasmania* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1973), ch. 4; G. H. Scholefield, *A Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs, 1940), vol. 1, 121. The account given here also makes use of Burn's letters to Alexander Serle held in the Alexander Turnbull Library (Wellington, New Zealand), the Mitchell Library (Sydney, Australia) and the Rhodes House Library (Oxford, United Kingdom).

²⁸ Scholefield notes that he was an officer (*A Dictionary*).

²⁹ "Death of Mr. David Burn," *Taranaki Herald*, July 3, 1875, 3.

³⁰ Scholefield, *A Dictionary*.

³¹ Borchardt, "Burn, David."

Society Club in London. By 1841 he was settled on his property in Tasmania and was active in local affairs, accompanying Sir John and Lady Franklin on an expedition to the west coast of the island in 1842.

Burn's departure from Tasmania in July 1844 appears to have been precipitous, prompted by his insolvency and that of his mother; Burn himself noted that "in July '44 I left V. D. L. [Van Diemen's Land] penniless."³² He was in Sydney, where he was "a proprietor in the Australian Library,"³³ before departing from there on 4 April 1848 for New Zealand, arriving in Auckland with his wife on 17 April 1848. By November he was editing *The New Zealander*, a bi-weekly newspaper, and had become editor of *The Maori Messenger*, continuing an association with this newspaper until 1860. He became editor of the *Southern Cross* in February 1850 and of the *Auckland Register and Commercial and Shipping Gazette* in 1857. In 1859 Burn wrote that he was Editor of the *Register*, also Commercial Editor of the *New Zealander*, and "in my twelfth year as Editor *Maori Messenger*."³⁴ He established the *New Zealand Herald*, with W. C. Wilson, in November 1863 but did not remain a partner long, illness forcing his retirement.³⁵ He lived in retirement in Auckland until his death on 14 June 1875, his wife Catherine having predeceased him in 1873. At his funeral, "at his special request his corpse was enclosed in St. George's ensign and the Union jack thrown over the coffin in lieu of a pall ... he had left explicit instructions as to the details of the funeral ceremony."³⁶

Burn's Role in *The Maori Messenger*

Burn's career makes it clear that he was inclined to be litigious, did not let perceived slights lie, and fought doggedly on matters of principle. Although these characteristics may have made life uncomfortable for his contemporaries, they are useful characteristics for the historian, as they result in a plethora of documents for the researcher to investigate. Burn's position with *The Maori Messenger* and his relationship with the New Zealand government is fully, although not entirely unambiguously, articulated in correspondence, departmental memos and other documents collected as part of the government's archives and now housed in Archives New Zealand.³⁷ It is summarised here, using Burn's words as far as possible.

As noted above, the role of David Burn in the production of the government Maori-language newspaper *The Maori Messenger* has hitherto been considered

³² David Burn to Alexander Serle, May 28, 1850, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, MS Papers 3202.

³³ David Burn to Alexander Serle, January 24, 1849, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, Micro-MS-Coll-20-2120.

³⁴ David Burn to Alexander Serle, March 14, 1859, Mitchell Library, Sydney, Australia, MLDOC 637.

³⁵ *New Zealand Herald*, Jubilee issue, November 13, 1913, p. 1 c. 2.

³⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, June 18, 1875, p. 2 c. 6.

³⁷ IA 1, 1861/2131.

minor, if it has been noted at all. Close examination of correspondence between Burn and the government officials, of archival documents, and of Burn's diary suggests, however, that, despite his lack of knowledge of the Maori language, his role was much more significant than others have attributed to him. He may in fact have been responsible for the selection of most of the content of the early issues and for the leaders, which were translated into Maori by government officials. There is no doubt that Burn considered himself to have been the editor of *The Maori Messenger* from its start to October 1860. He noted in 1861 that from the paper's inception "up to the close of October 1860, a long term of twelve years, I occupied my post as editor of the Maori Messenger."³⁸ Precisely what the duties of the editor of *The Maori Messenger* were is not well defined, and they seem to have changed over time.

In October 1848 Sir George Grey invited Burn to "undertake the management" of a Maori-English newspaper. Burn "intimated a doubt of [his] competency for the office, owing to [his] ignorance of the native tongue and habits," but was told that he "would have abundant contributions placed at [his] disposal, and that [his] duties would be rather those of the revision of the writings of others and of preparing them for the Press, than of a writer of original papers of [his] own."³⁹ Burn agreed and received a letter of appointment dated 27 October 1848. He expressed his enthusiasm for the publication after five months as editor: "The Maori Messenger has succeeded beyond my hopes. The Gov. is charmed with it."⁴⁰ But as the years passed his frustration with dealing with the Native Secretary's Office grew.

When he began his editorial duties, Burn "was assisted by able and varied contributions from many competent pens," but, from the start, "the want of punctuality" and even "the positive hostility of the translators" impeded him and accounted for "the sad irregularity of the publication." In addition, "One by one, [the] contributors fell away" and Burn was therefore "thrown almost entirely upon [his] own individual resources for the subject matter it contained." *The Maori Messenger* won "the flattering commendations of the Colonial and British Journalists" and "contemporaries in the other Provinces of New Zealand." "No covert indication of individual inclination – no expression of doubtful tendency – was ever permitted to escape [Burn's] pen. Native improvement and instruction were [his] rules of action. These, and these only [were his] aim." "The experiment which [Burn] was entrusted to originate has been crowned with success; and the 'Maori Messenger' has, [he is] led to believe, become a Maori want."⁴¹

³⁸ David Burn to the Colonial Secretary, October 7, 1861. Archives New Zealand, IA 1, 1861/2131.

³⁹ David Burn to J.J. Symonds, Native Secretary, July 9, 1855, Archives New Zealand IA 1, 1861/2131.

⁴⁰ David Burn to Alexander Serle, May 21, 1849, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, Micro-MS-Coll-20-2120.

⁴¹ David Burn to J.J. Symonds, Native Secretary, July 9, 1855, Archives New Zealand IA 1, 1861/2131.

Burn considered himself the paper's "almost entire and unaided producer"⁴² and claimed that he was from "October 1848 to December 1853, indeed for a considerable period afterwards, with the exception of a few occasional and gifted contributors ... not only the Editor but also the sole writer of the 'Maori Messenger'."⁴³ In 1854 an investigation into the newspaper was conducted; Burn was suspended as editor for some months and the newspaper was not issued after 4 May in that year. When *The Maori Messenger* resumed in 1855, issues for January to April were produced by others, probably Davis as noted earlier. Thereafter Burn appears to have resumed as editor but was dismissed in October 1860.⁴⁴

By 1860 the government no longer felt that Burn's position was warranted. Because "many native officers [were] now on establishment, so ... employment of a 'commercial editor' [was] unnecessary and Burn's employment should cease on 30th June next."⁴⁵ Burn was advised on 22 October that his services were no longer required after the end of the month, because of "fresh arrangements having been made for the conduct of 'the Maori Messenger' by which the employment of an Editor to take charge of the English part only is rendered unnecessary." In his response, Burn strongly objected to receiving only one week's notice.⁴⁶

Burn was clearly proud of his participation in *The Maori Messenger*. He wrote that "the New Zealand – the Australian – and the British Press reproduced many of its papers, doing the Editor the honour to pronounce several of his articles to be of value, inasmuch as equal instruction was imparted to the European as to the Native reader."⁴⁷ "By [his] means, the Natives were instructed in the rural, commercial, and manifold industrial arts of life."⁴⁸ Burn observed that "when the Natives were invited to state what portion from the then 'Maori Messenger' gave them the most satisfaction, they unhesitatingly replied it was the Agricultural, Commercial and Maritime information presented, the branch to which [his] pen, of late years, has been almost exclusively restricted."⁴⁹

A more precise indication of Burn's role can be seen in his diary, only two volumes of which have been located. They cover the periods 1 May 1850 to 31 August 1851, and 10 October 1855 to 15 September 1858.

⁴² Burn to Nugent, April 15, 1854.

⁴³ Burn to Smith, October 24, 1860.

⁴⁴ Burn to Smith, October 24, 1860.

⁴⁵ C. W. Richmond, May 18, 1860, annotation on memo from Donald McLean, Native Secretary, Raglan, May 7, 1860, Archives New Zealand, IA 1, 1861/2131.

⁴⁶ Burn to Smith, October 24, 1860. Burn quotes large sections of Smith's letter in his reply.

⁴⁷ David Burn to T. Gore Browne, Governor of New Zealand, October 11, 1855, Archives New Zealand, IA 1, 1861/2131.

⁴⁸ Burn to Smith, October 24, 1860.

⁴⁹ Burn to Smith, October 24, 1860.

Saturday: 25th. Which proved to be a fair but
~~uncertain~~ doubtful looking day - Up between 10 and 11. I cleaning
 and Parrott stacking the timber rec^d on Thursday from
 Henderson. Wrote a note to Sir George, transmitting
 Clarke's design for title to my paper that was to have been
 binded, and off to town about 3^o clock - Met Sir George and
 was going to his house - He stopped, and we had a long
 and animated conversation relative to the writing an account
 of the N. 2^d war - Of this he greatly approved promising
 me to render me every assistance both with materials
 to construct and subscribers to pay for the work. Met

Figure 2: Excerpt from Burn's diary for May 25, 1850.

The almost daily diary entries for 1850 and 1851 make it clear that Burn was writing for *The Maori Messenger* under close government direction. For example, in entries for 28 and 29 August 1850 Burn recorded that his leading article, "a brief memoir of Heke," was in the opinion of Dillon (the Governor's military and civil secretary) "too favourable," and that Burn had to hurriedly write another.

Entries in the diary reveal something of the nature of the tasks Burn carried out. On 10 January 1851 he "Wrote a leading article for the Messenger on the benefits to be derived by a shark fishery and an export to China of their fins. ... gave my article to Davis" [who presumably translated it into Maori]. On 14 January he "Prepared Shipping Intelligence for Messenger, ... called at the native secretary's office. Gave the copy for Davis." The next day Burn "corrected proof for Messenger" and on 16 January he "Penned a paragraph for General Pitt's funeral for the Messenger. Away to town; took the article to Davis. Received and corrected proofs." On 24 January Burn "prepared shipping lists, rural kalendar, fable, and anecdote for Messenger. Went to town, and gave them to Davis" and the next day he "Made up shipping list to date, and wrote a leader for Messenger." On 30 January he "Wrote an account of yesterday's doings for the Messenger. ... Corrected Cross⁵⁰ and Messenger proofs, and got home, much exhausted, about eight."

In some of his diary entries Burn was rather more expansive about his role and its frustrations:

⁵⁰ *The Southern Cross*, a newspaper which Burn was editing at the time.

1851 August 9

Fagged and dull after my last night's exertions; and not very much in the vein for writing a pithy article for the Messenger. Hard is the fate of the petty provincial Journalist – but much more so that of the petty colonial Editor, who is looked to to supply a never ending, still increasing supply of sauce piquant, no matter whether he may be furnished or not furnished with materials for compounding it. How very different is this constant drain upon the brain from the occasional, vivid, and spontaneous contribution on a pet and long considered subject. It is a weary effort to be ever wise, and on every varying subject. It is really marvellous that so little nonsense should creep into papers, with but one or two minds to direct their machinery. It is a weary, thankless sort of life. Penned an article on the shipwrecked Frenchmen, lauding the natives for their humane conducts towards them, and descanting on the barbarous absurdity of war.

This role had changed by 1855. Entries in the 1855–1858 diary report Burn's regular writing of the commercial, agricultural and shipping reports. However, the diary entries also indicate he was engaged in more than just writing the commercial reports. Entries from the end of 1855 onward record him writing articles for *The Maori Messenger*, such as “a paper on drunkenness” (26 December 1855), “an article, detailing the progress of the Russian war” (21 May 1856), another on “the Agricultural Capabilities of Australia and N.Z.d” (25 August 1856), a “notice of Sir W. Denison's visit” (15 October 1857), and “a long promised article on Debt” (2 July 1858). He also wrote a leader for *The Maori Messenger* (31 March 1858). Burn also regularly proofread and revised the proofs of *The Maori Messenger* from April or May 1856, but the evidence is ambiguous and may on occasion apply only to correcting proofs of the Commercial reports.

Burn's description of himself as the editor of *The Maori Messenger* was contested by the New Zealand government. When his petition to seek money he believed he was owed finally reached the Private Grievance Select Committee in 1862, two questions relevant to his role were put to William Gisborne of the Colonial Secretary's Office:

(1) Will you inform the Committee who was the Editor of the Maori Messenger up to 1860?

I believe it was Mr Burn.

(2) Had he the entire Editorship?

He was appointed by Sir George Grey, in 1848. The terms were that his office should last for six months, he went on until the administration of Col. Wynyard who at one time directed that [words overscored, undecipherable] six months notice should be given to him and that he should be removed from the office. This I think was in 54. So far as I remember before this six months had elapsed,

Col. Wynyard allowed him to continue his duties, but I am not quite sure of the date – I remember at that time 2 or 3 Maori newspapers were published not under the editorship of Mr Burn. Mr Burn then continued as Editor and I believe drew his salary in that capacity until 1860, but I believe for the last two or three years previous to 1860 his practical work as Editor was to furnish the commercial portions of the Messenger the chief part of the other work was done, I believe, by Mr Smith or by his subordinates; between 57 & 60 he still drew his pay as Editor though his duties were [two words overscored] confined merely to the commercial columns.⁵¹

Mr. Stafford M.L.A. also appeared before the Committee. He noted that “there would appear to be some error in Mr Burns [*sic*] statement, when he asserted that he was Editor for 12 years, but he could not undertake to say that he was not Editor for nine years. From 57 to 60 he only furnished the Commercial intelligence, and that in English only: during that period, neither the leading article nor the general information were supplied by him.”⁵² This recollection, made after the event, is at odds with Burn’s diary entries made at the time.

What Was in the Newspaper?

The Maori Messenger’s aim was “the diffusion of useful knowledge among the natives;” implicit in this, as noted earlier, was to instruct Maori in “the rural, commercial, and manifold industrial arts of life” so they could conform to the norms of and participate in the commercial life of the developing colony. (*The Maori Messenger* had other aims in addition to its socio-economic aspirations, but these are not noted in this paper.) Paterson makes many comments about the content of the newspaper and its tone, warning the modern reader against applying present-day views: “nineteenth-century Maori did not possess twenty-first century sensibilities: they could tolerate the often-sanctimonious tone of the newspapers because they were already used to a rich diet of religious moralizing and improving advice from missionaries and some of their own leaders.” Issues of *The Maori Messenger* were valued by Maori “because they were one of the few sources of information other than the spoken word” and because they offered Maori a wider audience beyond the local marae.⁵³ Jenifer Curnow, Ngapere Hopa and Jane McRae have studied the content and tone of the Maori-language newspapers of the colonial period. They note, in particular, the form of Maori-language content and its relationship to marae traditions; the editorials are “witness to Maori using the newspapers as if they were their own marae. Editors often began with *mibi* or formal greetings to their readers, used the highly poetic

⁵¹ Minutes of Private Grievance Select Committee meeting, August 16, 1862. Archives New Zealand Le 1, 1862/13.

⁵² Minutes of Private Grievance Select Committee meeting, August 16, 1862.

⁵³ Paterson, *Colonial Discourses*, 200.

and rhetorical language of *whaikorero* in their writing, and drew on the genres and imagery of the oral tradition.”⁵⁴

Looking more closely at the commercial aspects of *The Maori Messenger’s* content, Paterson indicates that one of the colonists’ wishes was “to see Maori engaging with the market economy,” and there can be no doubt that *The Maori Messenger* was one tool used in pursuing this aim.⁵⁵ Hazel Petrie, an economic historian, has investigated the Maori economy in detail.⁵⁶ She observes that all of the government-sponsored Maori newspapers, including *The Maori Messenger*, contained material with “a heavy bias towards matters of commerce and Political Economy, albeit mingled with Christian messages and items of general knowledge.” Content valued by their Maori readers were “lists of market prices, shipping movements, and agricultural instruction.”⁵⁷ Taken at face value, that these were appreciated can be seen as an indication that the newspaper was meeting its aim of educating Maori in commercial and economic matters—that is, Maori had learned to value this type of content.

However, Petrie also convincingly argues that Maori were attuned to commercial matters well before these government newspapers were published. The Maori economy had expanded vigorously prior to Britain’s annexation of New Zealand in 1840, but by the time the Maori-language newspapers were published it had declined. Maori were travelling overseas by the 1790s, became ship owners, and actively traded with the newly established penal colony in Sydney, Australia. Fifty-six voyages transporting potatoes and grain grown by Maori are known to have been made by Maori and European traders between Sydney and New Zealand in 1830 alone. Flax, pigs, potatoes and timber were also exported.⁵⁸

What caused the decline in the Maori economy after 1840? Missionary and government policies placed higher premiums on crops other than those the Maori traded, and markets changed. Rather than extractive industries (timber, flax), intensive agricultural crops (wheat) and their products (flour) became the focus of these policies, partly because of Governor Grey’s strategies to “lessen [Maori] inclinations to war” by bringing them “into the capitalist fold.”⁵⁹ Maori also became consumers as well as producers in the new economy of the colony.

⁵⁴ Jenifer Curnow, Ngapare Hopa and Jane McRae, eds, *He Pitopito Korero no te Perehi Maori: Readings from the Maori-Language Press* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2006), 9.

⁵⁵ Paterson, *Colonial Discourses*, 201.

⁵⁶ Hazel Petrie, “Colonisation and the Involvement of the Maori Economy.” Paper presented at Session 24, XIII World Congress of Economic History, Buenos Aires, July 2002; *Chiefs of Industry: Maori Tribal Enterprises in Early Colonial New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2006).

⁵⁷ Petrie, *Chiefs of Industry*, 107.

⁵⁸ Petrie, “Colonisation.”

⁵⁹ Petrie, “Colonisation.”

Reception

To what extent were the aims of *The Maori Messenger* achieved? Opinions about the reception of the newspapers are mixed. Comment from 1845 and 1846 suggests that there was significant interest on the part of Maori in the first Maori-language newspaper, *Te Karere o Nui Tireni*. Walter Brodie, an Auckland resident for the first four years of colonial administration and Member of the New Zealand Parliament for the Suburbs of Auckland from 1855 to 1859, described the way in which *Te Karere o Nui Tireni* was read:

it is very amusing to see them [Maori] come into Auckland on the days of publication. One native of a party is generally selected to read the news aloud. When he takes his seat on the ground, a circle is then formed, and after the reader has promulgated the contents, the different natives, according to their rank, stand up and argue the different points contained, which being done, they retire home, and answer the different letters by writing to the editor who is the Protector of Aborigines.⁶⁰

Brodie's observations suggest considerable interest in and engagement with the newspaper. The literacy levels of Maori were high, although not as high as missionaries claimed.⁶¹

High hopes were held for *The Maori Messenger* when it resumed publication in 1849. Père Maxime Pétit, a French missionary in the Hokianga since 1842, wrote to Governor Grey in June 1849:

I receive with gratitude the examples of the Maori Messenger and am distributing them to the chiefs of the most influential tribes according to the supposed intentions of your Excellency. I am very flattered by this mark of consideration and I will do what is expected of me so that the natives put into practice the instruction and opinions contained in this paper to lead them towards civilisation. If your Excellency thinks it appropriate, I will engage several of the principal chiefs to send you a request for the Karere Maori. If they were to receive it directly from the part of your Excellency, it would have double value in their eyes; they would be flattered that their names are known to your Excellency and this would only have benefits.⁶²

⁶⁰ W. Brodie, *Remarks on the Past and Present State of New Zealand* (London, 1845), 108–10, quoted in Parkinson & Griffith *Books in Maori*, 745–46).

⁶¹ An examination of the missionary claims is to be found in D. F. McKenzie's "The Sociology of Text: Oral Culture, Literacy and Print in Early New Zealand," *The Library*, sixth series 6 (1984): 333–65.

⁶² Translation from the French of letter from Pétit, Hokianga, to Grey, June 16, 1849, Auckland Public Library, Grey NZ Letters P12(2): Je reçois avec reconnaissance quelques exemplaires du Maori Messenger et les distribue aux chefs des plus influentes tribes selon les intentions supposées de votre Excellence. Je suis très flatté de cette marque de considération et je ferai ce que dépendra de moi pour que les naturels mettent en pratiques l'instruction et les avis que cette feuille contient pour les conduire à la civilisation. Si votre Excellence le jugeoit convenable, j'engagerois quelques uns des principaux chefs à vous adresser une demande pour obtenir le Karere Maori. S'ils le recevoient

The phrase “to lead them towards civilisation” indicates Pétit’s acceptance of one of the aims that had been stated in launching the newspaper.

Another comment about *The Maori Messenger*’s early issues is that of a Church Missionary Society missionary, the Reverend Thomas Chapman, who had worked among Maori in Paihia, Rotorua and Maketu for twenty years. In a letter to Governor Grey in 1850, he was less positive than Pétit. “Some of the papers are calculated to do anything but good,” he wrote, giving an example:

Surprise & interest may be excited – but minutely detailed accounts of the horrid acts of pirates – slavery, with ladies prepared to be delighted with harems – banditti, almost proved to be very fine fellows! – seem not just the things required.

Chapman suggested improvements:

I really think in these days of universal information, something equally interesting, tending to enlighten & improve might be found ... Lengthened accounts are not palatable to the natives. Brief & bright, as far as practicable, should ever be the motto of the Editor of “The Maori Messenger.”

With such changes as these, he acknowledged *The Maori Messenger* to be “capable of being made an instrument of much good.”⁶³

Comments recorded in the 1856 report of a board of enquiry appointed by Governor Grey, consisting of Mr. C. W. Ligar (Surveyor-General, as chairman), Major Nugent (58th Regiment, formerly Native Secretary), Mr. W. C. Daldy (Member of the House of Representatives) and Mr. T. H. Smith (Acting Native Secretary and Resident Magistrate, Rotorua), suggested that the newspaper had merit but was underutilised and could be improved. It was considered by Mr. Fenton, Resident Magistrate at Kaipara and Native Secretary briefly in 1856, to be “a most useful instrument,”⁶⁴ and by Mr. Joseph of Kawhia as “sought after.”⁶⁵ Riwai Te Ahu was the only Maori to add his comments to those of the pakeha in his contribution to the enquiry: “The ‘Maori Messenger’ may be sent through the missionaries and chiefs and native teachers. The newspaper is beneficial to the native race; they learn many things therefrom.”⁶⁶ East Coast merchant Mr. A. Campbell suggested that “The Maories believe anything that appears in the Maori Messenger; there is not a corner they do not read.”⁶⁷

directement de la part de votre Excellence, il auroit un double prix à leurs yeux; ils seroient flattés de ce que leurs noms sont connus de votre Excellence et ceci ne pourroit avoir que de bons effets.

⁶³ Thomas Chapman, Maketu, to Grey, June 20, 1850, Auckland Public Library, Grey NZ Letters C11(3).

⁶⁴ BPP 1860(492), 268 and 310.

⁶⁵ BPP 1860(492), 277.

⁶⁶ BPP 1860(492), 278.

⁶⁷ BPP 1860(492), 102.

Numerous suggestions for improvement were made in order to make the newspaper “more extensively used in instructing the natives” (Mr. Fenton, Resident Magistrate at Kaipara, 9 April, 1856)⁶⁸ and “more useful in showing the natives the benefits arising from European habits and customs” (Mr. Superintendent Brown, of Taranaki, 22 April 1856).⁶⁹ The number of copies printed and circulated needed to be increased (Mr. Rogan, District Commissioner, April 1856),⁷⁰ as “Five hundred copies of the ‘Maori Messenger’ are not sufficient for the use of the natives” (Mr. John White, 11 April 1856).⁷¹ It should be issued more frequently, weekly being suggested by Mr. Commissioner Johnson, of the Whangarei District, 22 April 1856.⁷² The most sought-after section of the paper was its commercial intelligence, especially the Prices Current: “Matters of trade and prices for produce they value” (Mr. Joseph, of Kawhia, 3 April 1856).⁷³ “I think the laws should as much as possible be published therein” suggested Francis Fenton, Resident Magistrate at Kaipara (9 April 1856).⁷⁴ Not appreciated by Maori, it was suggested, were “the tales or anecdotes published,” of which “The natives take little notice” (Mr. Joseph, of Kawhia, 3 April 1856).⁷⁵ The words of James Busby, who had been the former British Resident and by that time had been in New Zealand for 26 years, summed up the majority of comments: “I think the press might be made more efficient; the ‘Maori Messenger’ might be made exceedingly useful. I know of nothing better calculated to enlighten the natives than the ‘Maori Messenger’, if properly conducted” (J. Busby, Esq., Bay of Islands, 30 April 1856).⁷⁶

The Board of Inquiry made recommendations for expanding the distribution of *The Maori Messenger*:

that the press should be used as much as possible for the diffusion of useful knowledge among the natives, and that the “Maori Messenger” should be printed every week, and agents appointed through the country for receiving and distributing it;

that a list of these agents should be printed in the paper itself, so that the natives may know where to apply for copies;

that one copy be directed and sent gratuitously to chiefs, assessors, and native teachers, and two copies to each mission station, and that for all of the other copies

⁶⁸ BPP 1860(492), 268.

⁶⁹ BPP 1860(492), 285.

⁷⁰ BPP 1860(492), 276.

⁷¹ BPP 1860(492), 306.

⁷² BPP 1860(492), 284.

⁷³ BPP 1860(492), 277.

⁷⁴ BPP 1860(492), 268.

⁷⁵ BPP 1860(492), 277.

⁷⁶ BPP 1860(492), 302–3.

a small charge should be made, so as to get the natives as soon as possible out of the habit of expecting to get things for nothing.⁷⁷

The Maori Messenger also received attention in the New Zealand Parliament. Hansard has a lengthy entry in 1862 recording debate about the newspaper.⁷⁸ The motion moved by Mr. William Colenso (who was eminently qualified to comment as a printer and missionary of long standing) was “That, in the opinion of this House, it is highly desirable that the Government serial called the *Maori Messenger*, printed for and circulated among the Maoris, should be placed under proper supervision and made as effective as possible.” Colenso “complained of the general manner in which that serial was conducted. ... When the *Maori Messenger* was commenced a large number of them were regularly sent to him for distribution among the Maoris in the District of Hawke’s Bay. The Maoris were very glad to get them then – they were both interesting and instructive; but now they looked upon them with dismay.” Detailed discussion of the reasons is recorded: inappropriate content, “errors of selection, errors of translation, and gross typographical errors.” Mr. Richmond seconded the motion and commented “looking at the general character of the *Maori Messenger* from the first down to this day, he must say that it was utterly unfitted to get hold on the Native people, and the very dullest and dreariest production that ever it was his lot to read.” The motion was agreed to.

It is tempting to conjecture about a connection between the dissatisfaction expressed in the report and Burn’s dismissal in 1860. As early as 1851 Burn complained about the difficulty he experienced in getting content (for example, in the diary entry for 9 August 1851, quoted earlier); his complaints continued in letters in 1855, in which he noted “One by one, my contributors fell away,”⁷⁹ and 1861, where he claimed that “from its foundation up to the close of 1854, [he] was almost the exclusive writer of the *Maori Messenger*.”⁸⁰ One reading of Colenso’s comments in 1862 is that the content of *The Maori Messenger* deteriorated after Burn was forced out of his role with the newspaper in 1860.

One later comment is noteworthy. Sir John Eldon Gorst, resident in Waikato from 1860 to 1863, pulled no punches when he noted of *The Maori Messenger* in 1864: “Of the stuff thus circulated amongst them as political wisdom, it is impossible to speak in terms of sufficient contempt. ... Successive governors and colonial ministers have vainly laboured to cure the dull idiocy of this

⁷⁷ BPP 1860(492), 97.

⁷⁸ Hansard, August 8, 1862, in *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates 1861 to 1863* (Wellington: Government Printer, 1868), 518–22.

⁷⁹ David Burn to J. J. Symonds, Native Secretary, July 9, 1855. Archives New Zealand, IA 1, 1861/2131.

⁸⁰ David Burn, Petition of October 7, 1861. Archives New Zealand, IA 1, 1861/2131.

newspaper.”⁸¹ Gorst’s conjecture was that “the incurable badness of the paper” could perhaps be explained by the constraints placed upon the editor so that he did not cause affront to the chiefs, Governor and Native Minister, churchmen, missionaries, or colonial shopkeepers.

Conclusion

David Burn’s part in *The Maori Messenger* has hitherto been considered minor, with a significant role being given to C. O. B. Davis. Contemporary evidence suggests otherwise. Burn appears to have been principally responsible for the content of the newspaper for much of its life, although with oversight by government officials, and with a diminution of responsibilities after 1854. Through selectively culling excerpts from newspapers and other sources, and through his original contributions, David Burn as editor of the newspaper was primarily reinforcing ways of thinking and acting that had prevailed among Maori before the establishment of the machinery of colonial administration in New Zealand. Grey, Burn, Davis and the others who instigated, controlled, edited and published *The Maori Messenger* may have thought that the newspaper was a necessary tool in forming the mindset of the Maori people so that they understood “the rural, commercial, and manifold industrial arts of life” in order to participate in the commercial life of the developing colony. This paper suggests otherwise: that significant aspects of the desired identity were already present and thriving, in particular a mastery of the commercial “arts of life.”

Simmons College, Boston

⁸¹ Sir John Eldon Gorst. *The Maori King* (London: Macmillan, 1864), 53–54.

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