

Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush:

From wilderness to native bush reserve

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Abstract

This research essay examines the significance of Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush to the various facets of Canterbury's history to which it is connected.

Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush is a place of significance to the history of Canterbury as it helps to tell the story of the environment, Maori and the first pioneers of the Canterbury Plains. This research essay draws upon a number of primary sources, such as legislation and personal correspondence, in order to answer the question of why an area of native bush within the city of Christchurch is still significant and relevant today. The answer to this question lies in the ability of the Bush to tell the story of the Canterbury Plains, and those who have called the area home, from the 1300s until the present day. Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush is the only remnant of the Kahikatea Swamp forests which once covered the Canterbury Plains and therefore contributes to the environmental history of New Zealand. The Bush also uncovers the cultural and social practices of local Maori before the arrival of the first European settlers. However, the reason that Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush remains so significant today is because of its connection to the pioneering foundations of Christchurch. The Bush inspired and influenced the Deans brothers, Canterbury's first successful pioneers, and the Canterbury Association, to choose the Plains as the location of the city of Christchurch. It is highly probable that had the Bush not existed upon the Plains then the city of Christchurch may have been established elsewhere. The current use of Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush as a conservation area and meeting place ensures that each of these facets of Canterbury's history are acknowledged and remain relevant and significant within Christchurch today.

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Introduction

Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush is located at the centre of the suburb of Riccarton, Christchurch, and consists of approximately 15 acres of trees and shrubs that are native and unique to New Zealand. These 15 acres are all that remain of the Kahikatea Swamp forest that once covered the Canterbury Plains and as such are an important piece of Christchurch's environmental history. Riccarton Bush is also the former home of the pioneering Deans family who used the natural resources available to them within the Bush to establish their successful farm.

Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush is now a native bush reserve which is open for the public to enjoy and has become a significant conservation area within the city of Christchurch.

The significance of Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush lies in its ability to connect together a number of different facets of Canterbury's history. The Bush illustrates the relationship that can be established between the natural environment and the built environment. The aim of this research essay is to explicitly outline the significance of the Bush to these various facets of Christchurch's history to which it has a connection. Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush helps to tell the story of New Zealand's environment and of how Maori lived on the Canterbury Plains before the arrival of the first European settlers. The Bush also helps to tell the history of Canterbury's foremost pioneering family, the Deans, as well as how the Canterbury Association came to choose the Port Cooper Plains for the settlement of Christchurch. Furthermore, the transformation from wilderness to a native bush reserve has turned Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush into a conservation and heritage area which is open for the public to enjoy. This has ensured that each

facet of Christchurch's history in relation to the Bush; environmental, Maori, pioneering and heritage, remain relevant and significant to Christchurch today.

The existing historiography of Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush focusses primarily on the Deans family and the ecological significance of the Bush. There is little material which discusses the significance of the site to local Maori or the use of the Bush by the settlement of Christchurch. I will therefore discuss those parts of the Bush's history which have previously been omitted from the historiography. A limited amount of literature has been written about the Bush and Homestead. The key texts that I have used include Gordon Ogilvie's *Pioneers of the Plains: The Deans of Canterbury* (1996) and Brian Molloy's edited collection titled *Riccarton Bush: Putaringamotu* (1995). Each of these texts have been extremely useful in understanding the story of the Deans family and the ongoing management of the Bush. Ogilvie has a greater focus on the Deans family themselves as his book was written as a celebration of the Family and is a testament to their contributions to Canterbury. Molloy's edited volume concentrates on the environmental and ecological significance of the Bush. The majority of the chapters are dedicated to discussing the physical environment and the flora and fauna which inhabit the Bush. My research essay attempts to bridge the gap between these two texts by discussing the environmental history of the Bush as well as the significance it has had upon the Deans family and Christchurch.

I have also consulted a number of scholars whose focus and approach are similar to my own. These scholars include Jack Kós¹, Geoffrey Rice², Graham Miller³ and

¹ Jack Kós, 'A Most Excellent Thing: The introduction of brown trout (*Salmo trutta*) to Canterbury, New Zealand 1864-1872,' BA Honours Thesis, University of Canterbury, 2013.

² Geoffrey W. Rice, *Christchurch Changing: An Illustrated History* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 1999).

Katie Pickles.⁴ In particular I have referred to Pickles' work on Bottle Lake Forest Park. Pickles' traces the history of this area from its beginnings as a wasteland to its use today as a recreational site.⁵ Like Pickles' I also intend to show the significance of Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush to Christchurch as a place of environmental and Maori cultural significance, as she did with Bottle Lake Forest.⁶ However, I will expand on Pickles' work by illustrating the significance of the Bush to Canterbury's pioneering heritage.

I shall take a chronological approach in order to discuss the significance of the Bush to the various facets of Christchurch's history, beginning with the creation of the swamp forest on the Plains and finishing with the place of Riccarton Bush and House within today's city. I shall therefore effectively be tracing the history of the Bush and its significance to Canterbury from a wilderness to a native bush reserve. A range of primary sources will be used in order to discuss the significance of Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush; however secondary sources have been used, particularly in Chapter One. The use of these secondary sources to discuss the environment and Maori use of the Bush reflects the lack of primary sources which are available concerning these topics. In relation to the ecological significance of the Bush the secondary sources which I have used are the most recent and come from academic scholars who specialise in the environment. The lack of primary sources when discussing the Maori use of Putaringamotu is a result of the oral nature of Maori history. In most cases I have attempted to use

³ Graham M. Miller, 'Jane Deans – Dictionary of New Zealand Biography,' accessed September 12, 2015, www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1d6/deans-jane, and Graham M. Miller, 'John Deans – Dictionary of New Zealand Biography,' accessed September 12, 2015, www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/1d7/deans-john.

⁴ Katie Pickles, 'The Re-Creation of Bottle Lake: From site of discard to environmental playground?' *Environment and History* vol. 9, 2003.

⁵ Pickles, 'The Re-Creation of Bottle Lake,' 419.

⁶ Pickles, 'The Re-Creation of Bottle Lake,' 422.

secondary material from reliable scholars who have worked extensively with Ngai Tahu.

This research paper includes three chapters which outline the significance of Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush to the Deans family of Canterbury and the city of Christchurch. Chapter One discusses the ecological significance of Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush to the environmental history of the Canterbury Plains before outlining the significance of the area to local Maori as a mahinga kai or food gathering place. The second chapter begins by discussing Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush as the home of the Deans brother's and the success they had in establishing their farm. The second chapter then goes on to describe the significance of the Bush to Canterbury's pioneering history as a natural resource which was used to build the settlement of Christchurch. Chapter Three outlines the transition of Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush from a wilderness to a native reserve. This final chapter also describes the significance of the Bush as a conservation area which is vital to Christchurch's environmental history and heritage tourism industry.

Chapter One: Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush before 1840

Environmental Significance of Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush to Canterbury

The environmental significance of Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush cannot be over emphasized. It is all that remains of the expansive Podocarp Swamp forest that once covered the Canterbury Plains and therefore tells a story of the environmental history of New Zealand. Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush is also the only forest of its kind in the world making it incredibly ecologically significant both nationally and internationally.

According to Doctor Leonard Cockayne, writing in 1906, "Riccarton Bush is especially noteworthy as being the sole remaining portion of that vast forest which, at one time, must have occupied much of the country near the coast of Canterbury."⁷ It is for this reason that Cockayne saw the Bush at Riccarton to be of particular importance to the environmental history of Canterbury and New Zealand. Prior to the 1300s, the Canterbury Plains were covered with Podocarp Swamp forests.⁸ These swamp forests contained plant associations which consisted primarily of Kahikatea (White Pine), Maitai (Black Pine) and Totara.⁹ Forests of this nature primarily grew in the Leeward Province of New Zealand, an area which covered the majority of the east coast, while the Windward Province covered the remaining area.¹⁰ Each of these provinces contain varying climate conditions in which different types of forests are able to grow. The Windward

⁷ Leonard Cockayne, 'Riccarton Bush,' (Lyttelton: Lyttelton Times Company, 1906), 1.

⁸ Brian Molloy and Len Brown, 'Vegetation History,' *Riccarton Bush: Putaringamotu*, ed. by Brian Molloy (Christchurch: The Caxton Press, 1995), 101.

⁹ Atholl Anderson, 'A Fragile Plenty: Pre-European Maori and the New Zealand environment,' *Environmental Histories of New Zealand*, ed. by Eric Pawson and Tom Brooking (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002), 27.

¹⁰ Anderson, 'A Fragile Plenty', 26-27.

Province is exposed to westerly winds which tend to be quite humid and thus produce conditions in which Rimu, Totara and Kauri trees flourish.¹¹ However, when these westerly winds reach the Southern Alps they are trapped and have to go over the top of the mountain range.¹² As the wind rises it becomes cooler, causing condensation which results in rain or snow along the Alps.¹³ The wind that reaches the Leeward Province is drier and warmer than that in the Windward Province.¹⁴ These conditions create the perfect climate for the formation of open Podocarp Swamp forest. The Southern Alps also played a key role in the original formation of the Canterbury Plains' Swamp forest. Radiocarbon dating has been unable to give an exact date for the formation of the majority of the forest; however scientists have hypothesized that its formation occurred two-thousand years before it was destroyed, between 1300 and 1500.¹⁵ What scientists do know is that the formation of the forest was a result of the glacial torrents which flowed across the Canterbury Plains.¹⁶ These torrents would have contained gravel, shingle and mud which became a solid base that was later covered with a fine silt that was deposited with the help of strong north-westerly winds.¹⁷ This silt formed the perfect ground conditions for the growth of the Podocarp Swamp forest.¹⁸ Kahikatea seeds were then blown across the Canterbury plains from the Port Hills, which at this time was covered with trees and shrubs.¹⁹ The Kahikatea was

¹¹ Anderson, 'A Fragile Plenty,' 27.

¹² Alan Ryan, 'Climate and Weather,' *Riccarton Bush: Putaringamotu*, ed. by Brian Molloy (Christchurch: The Caxton Press, 1995), 70.

¹³ Ryan, 'Climate and Weather,' 70.

¹⁴ Ryan, 'Climate and Weather,' 70.

¹⁵ Molloy and Brown, 'Vegetation History,' 101.

¹⁶ Ian McBride, *Riccarton: The Founding Borough – A short history, Canterbury's founding settlement* (Christchurch: The Caxton Press, 1994), 1.

¹⁷ McBride, *Riccarton: The Founding Borough*, 1.

¹⁸ Trevor Webb, 'Soils and Landforms,' *Riccarton Bush: Putaringamotu*, ed. by Brian Molloy (Christchurch: The Caxton Press, 1995), 67.

¹⁹ McBride, *Riccarton: The Founding Borough*, 1.

able to take root and eventually provided forest like conditions which enabled other native trees and shrubs, 67 varieties in all, to grow.²⁰

The forest soon became the ideal home of a number of native animals, primarily the moa. It was the arrival of the moa that ultimately led to the deforestation of the majority of the Canterbury Plains. Moa hunters arrived between 1300 and 1500 and radiocarbon dating of charcoal has resulted in scientists claiming that fires started by the moa hunters were the primary cause of the majority of deforestation.²¹ However, more recently John Holloway, a forester, has blamed the deforestation of the Canterbury Plains on significant climate change. This climate change occurred around the beginning of the thirteenth century and resulted in “cooler, windier and much drier conditions that affected forest regeneration and set a trajectory towards scrubland and grassland in eastern districts.”²² Holloway believes that the fires set by moa hunters was the catalyst for the destruction of these forests, however the destruction was exacerbated by the significant changes in climate conditions.²³ Only small areas of forest on the Canterbury Plains were able to regenerate following these fires and by the time of the first early European settler’s arrival there appeared to be only two small areas of bush remaining.²⁴ In 1834, Captain William Rhodes, climbed to the top of the Port Hills and wrote that he “saw the Plains and two pieces of bush. All the land that I saw was swamp and mostly covered with water.”²⁵ It is thought that these two areas of Bush were those at Riccarton and Papanui that had been able to

²⁰ Cockayne, ‘Riccarton Bush,’ 2.

²¹ Molloy and Brown, ‘Vegetation History,’ 101.

²² Anderson, ‘A Fragile Plenty,’ 19.

²³ Atholl Anderson, ‘Origins, Settlement and Society of Pre-European South Polynesia,’ *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, ed. by Giselle Byrnes (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2009), 33.

²⁴ William B. Rhodes, cited in ‘The First Herds,’ *The Press*, 28 September 1926. Available from: PapersPast., accessed August 20, 2015.

²⁵ Rhodes, cited in ‘The First Herds.’

rejuvenate themselves. It should be noted that even though the forest fires occurred between 1300 and 1500 the oldest trees currently in Riccarton Bush are only 600 years old, with the majority being approximately 150 to 550 years old – showing that the Bush is capable of rejuvenating itself in ideal conditions.²⁶ Doctor Cockayne believed that the significance of Riccarton Bush lay in the fact that it is all that remains of a piece of New Zealand’s environmental history. The Bush is therefore incredibly significant as it is the last remnant of the once expansive forest that not only covered the Canterbury Plains, but the majority of the Leeward Province.

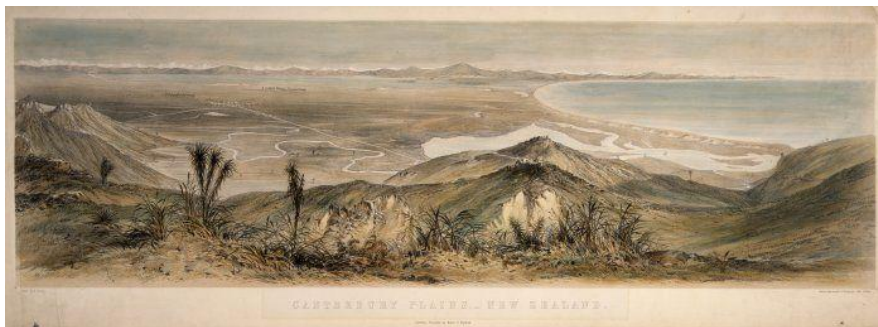


Figure 1. Drawing by Edmund Norman of the Canterbury Plains showing the two areas of native bush at Riccarton and Papanui, circa. 1855.

[Source: Edmund Norman, ‘Canterbury Plains - New Zealand,’ accessed September 20, 2015, <http://mp.natlib.govt.nz/detail/?id=8818&l=mi>.]

Doctor Cockayne also saw the Bush at Putaringamotu/Riccarton as ecologically significant to New Zealand’s environmental history due to the types of plants that grew together in this particular area. He wrote that the bush was not only valuable as “a fine collection of indigenous trees and shrubs, but because the combination of these is unique, there is no other similar combination on the face of the earth.”²⁷

In order for these plants to grow together certain soil, moisture and climate

²⁶ *Riccarton Bush Reserve Management Plan October 1991*, Riccarton Bush Trust, 1991, 9.

²⁷ Leonard Cockayne, cited in Arnold Wall, *The Riccarton Bush* (Christchurch: Lyttelton Times Company Ltd., 1922), 5.

conditions are required. Cockayne believed that the conditions were optimal at Riccarton as it was positioned directly between two areas which produced completely different conditions.²⁸ Riccarton Bush was situated between a very wet, swampy area at the base of the Port Hills, where little was able to grow, and an area that was incredibly dry towards the Southern Alps, where only grass was able to grow.²⁹ These two areas met in the middle at Riccarton and produced, according to Cockayne, “very peculiar” conditions.³⁰ It was the ability of these plants to grow together in one place that Cockayne found particularly interesting about the Bush. Cockayne was extremely interested in plant associations and placed a lot of emphasis on preserving areas of bush as natural museums.³¹ The preservation of individual species of plants was relatively simple, even in the early 1900s, as Botanical Gardens became popular within New Zealand.³² However, Cockayne believed that the real significance of Riccarton Bush was in how different tree species grew together within one area or plant association.³³ It was therefore incredibly important to Cockayne to see that the conditions at Riccarton were preserved, as close as possible, to their original condition to ensure that this unique plant association continued to regenerate and grow. The ecological marvel at Riccarton, as described by Cockayne, is therefore an incredibly significant part of New Zealand’s environmental history. This particular grouping of plants is not seen anywhere else in the world, and its position within Christchurch makes it a valuable place for the city. It is the uniqueness of the Bush and the environmental

²⁸ Wall, *The Riccarton Bush*, 5.

²⁹ Wall, *The Riccarton Bush*, 5.

³⁰ Cockayne, cited in Wall, *The Riccarton Bush*, 5.

³¹ Paul Star and Lynne Lochhead, ‘Children of the Burnt Bush: New Zealanders and the indigenous remnant, 1880-1930,’ *Making a New Land: Environmental histories of New Zealand*, second edn., ed. by Eric Pawson and Tom Brooking (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2013), 152.

³² Star and Lochhead, ‘Children of the Burnt Bush,’ 152.

³³ Star and Lochhead, ‘Children of the Burnt Bush,’ 152.

history of New Zealand, which it represents, that makes it a significant ecological area both nationally and internationally.

Significance of Putaringamotu to Local Maori

Putaringamotu played a significant role in the life of Maori before the arrival of the first European settlers on the Port Cooper Plains. The area was used as a mahinga kai and resting place for local Maori and as such it is an area of great importance within the history of Ngai Tahu. Putaringamotu helps to tell the story of Ngai Tahu and sheds light on a number of their cultural practices and beliefs.

Ngai Tahu was the dominant tribe within the South Island and controlled the majority of the area from Kahurangi and Cape Campbell southwards.³⁴ One of Ngai Tahu's sub-tribes, Ngai Tuahuriri, looked after and lived on what is now known as the Canterbury Plains, an area on the east coast of the South Island which stretched from Lake Ellesmere to the Hurunui.³⁵ Ngai Tuahuriri's fortified pa was located at Kaiapoi and provided security for the tribe whose population had been decimated prior to 1840 as a result of war.³⁶ The need for a fortified pa, which could protect and accommodate the remaining members of Ngai Tuahuriri, was therefore of incredible importance. However, Ngai Tuahuriri could not survive on the food they produced at the pa themselves and therefore had to look elsewhere on the Canterbury Plains for food and other valuable natural resources.³⁷ Ngai Tuahuriri had a number of Kainga or unfortified settlements on the site of present day Christchurch, where they gathered food or rested whilst on

³⁴ Harry C. Evison, *Ngai Tahu Land Rights and the Crown Pastoral Lease Lands in the South Island* (Christchurch: Ngai Tahu Maori Trust Board, 1986), 11.

³⁵ Harry C. Evison, *The Ngai Tahu Deeds: A window on New Zealand History* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2006), 17.

³⁶ Evison, *The Ngai Tahu Deeds*, 20-21.

³⁷ Gordon Ogilvie, *Pioneers on the Plains: The Deans of Canterbury* (Christchurch: Shoal Bay Press, 1996), 11.

long journeys.³⁸ One such kainga was known to local Maori as Putaringamotu and was located at one of the remaining areas of native bush on the Canterbury Plains. Putaringamotu consisted of approximately 50 acres of bush in which the local Maori gathered food and other natural resources.³⁹ Putaringamotu was a significant mahinga kai or food gathering place to Ngai Tuahuriri as it was abound with fresh fish and birdlife.⁴⁰ Within the Bush itself were wood pigeons and kaka while the Otakaro and Waimairi Rivers contained freshwater crayfish, eels, flounder and native trout.⁴¹ The open grassland was also inhabited by large quantities of native quail.⁴² Upon the Deans brothers' arrival, John wrote to his father detailing the abundance of wildlife in the area. He states, that there were "a good many eels as thick as a man's leg and very fat; very fine flounders; abundance of quail; a great many descriptions of duck; a large parrot called kaka; and woodhen."⁴³ This abundance of fresh meat made Putaringamotu one of the most significant mahinga kai on the Canterbury Plains. Putaringamotu was more significant than the bush at Papanui due to its proximity to the Otakaro River which provided the fresh fish that was an important part of the Maori diet.⁴⁴ Its use as a mahinga kai also helps to shed light on how Maori procured food and made use of natural resources. Putaringamotu therefore helps to uncover the history of how Maori lived before European contact and gives insight into the practice of food gathering within Maori culture.

³⁸ *Riccarton Bush Reserve Management Plan October 1991*, 9

³⁹ Evison, *The Ngai Tahu Deeds*, 19.

⁴⁰ Evison, *The Ngai Tahu Deeds*, 17.

⁴¹ Evison, *The Ngai Tahu Deeds*, 17.

⁴² John Deans, 'John Deans to John Deans Sen., Port Cooper, 28th September, 1845,' *Pioneers of Canterbury: Deans Letters 1840-1854*, ed. by John Deans III (Dunedin: A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1938), 93-95.

⁴³ Deans, 'John Deans to John Deans Sen., Port Cooper, 28th September, 1845,' 93-95.

⁴⁴ *Riccarton Bush Reserve Management Plan October 1991*, 9.

Ngai Tuahuriri named the area Putaringamotu which when translated means 'the place of an echo.'⁴⁵ The area derived its name from the Maori belief that a person could lay their ear to the ground and hear if someone was approaching the area.⁴⁶ They could ascertain as to what direction these footsteps were coming from and could go in that direction in order to get a visual of the approaching party.⁴⁷ They could then determine whether the approaching party was a friend or enemy and have time to act accordingly.⁴⁸ Putaringamotu was therefore a highly defensible area even without built fortifications. Scientist Brian Molloy, who has written extensively on the ecological importance of the Bush, believes that the ability to hear footfalls was a result of the peaty nature of the soil within the Bush.⁴⁹ Peat is incredibly soft and easily compressed which means that when people walk across it their footsteps reverberate through the soil.⁵⁰ The ability to be vigilant and easily defend the area meant that the site was an area of great significance to Ngai Tuahuriri. The translation of Putaringamotu also provides some insight into the beliefs of Ngai Tuahuriri. The tribe believed that only those specifically trained to hear footfalls could do so, thus showing their cultural belief in the training of certain practices and the hierarchy of some members of the tribe. Another translation of Putaringamotu, 'the place of the severed ear,' is thought to refer to its geographical location and most likely means that it was simply an area of Bush which was separated from the rest.⁵¹ The geographical position of the Bush aided local Maori who were travelling throughout the South Island as the central location

⁴⁵ Brian Molloy, 'Preface,' *Riccarton Bush: Putaringamotu*, ed. by Brian Molloy (Christchurch: The Caxton Press, 1995), xi.

⁴⁶ Rakihiia Tau, cited in Molloy, 'Preface,' xi.

⁴⁷ Tau, cited in Molloy, 'Preface,' xi.

⁴⁸ Tau, cited in Molloy, 'Preface,' xi.

⁴⁹ Ogilvie, *Pioneers on the Plains*, 11.

⁵⁰ Webb, 'Soils and Landforms,' 61.

⁵¹ W. A Taylor, *Lore and History of the South Island Maori* (Christchurch: Bascands, 1950), 46.

meant that it could be used as a resting place when travelling between the east and west coasts.⁵² The significance of Putaringamotu was further cemented within Maori history in 1965 when the burial ground or urupa of the Putaringamotu Pa was discovered.⁵³

The natural resources that Putaringamotu provided to local Maori firmly secured its place within Maori history as a significant mahinga kai and resting place. The area also provides knowledge regarding Maori cultural practices and beliefs.

Following the arrival of the Deans brothers, Putaringamotu became less significant to local Maori as other food resources became available rendering the need for multiple mahinga kai on the Plains unnecessary. Nevertheless, it is still important to acknowledge the significant role that Putaringamotu once played in the history of Maori on the Canterbury Plains.

⁵² McBride, *Riccarton: The Founding Borough*, 4.

⁵³ McBride, *Riccarton: The Founding Borough*, 5.

Chapter Two: Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush's Place in Christchurch's Pioneering History

Scottish brothers, William and John Deans arrived in New Zealand hoping to farm in the colony. William selected the Port Cooper Plains, and the bush at Putaringamotu, as the place where he and his brother would set up their family farm. The Bush was significant as it influenced William's choice of farm land because of the natural resources it provided. These resources were required to establish a successful farm. The brothers were later joined on the Plains by the Canterbury Association settlement of Christchurch. The new settlement gravitated towards the brothers and the Bush as it provided them with inspiration and resources which were required to build a new frontier settlement.

Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush is therefore a significant place within Canterbury's pioneering history.

Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush as the Deans Family Farm

William selected the land at Putaringamotu after visiting the area twice following his arrival in New Zealand in January 1840.⁵⁴ He wrote to his younger brother that the Port Cooper Plains would be far more suitable than the land they had purchased, sight unseen, in Wellington and Nelson. John, who arrived in New Zealand in October 1842, was disappointed with the small settlement in Nelson.⁵⁵ The land that he had purchased was swampy and natural resources, particularly

⁵⁴ John Deans, 'John Deans to John Deans Sen., Port Nicholson, 16th January, 1843,' *Pioneers of Canterbury: Deans Letters 1840-1854*, ed. by John Deans III (Dunedin: A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1938), 60.

⁵⁵ John Deans, 'John Deans to Gavin Brackenridge, Port Nicholson, 16th January, 1843,' *Pioneers of Canterbury: Deans Letters 1840-1854*, ed. by John Deans III (Dunedin: A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1938), 54-55.

wood, were too far away from the settlement to be convenient.⁵⁶ Once John received word from his brother regarding the disappointing land in Wellington, and having seen the unsuitable land in Nelson for himself, John decided, on his brother's advice, that the Port Cooper Plains would be better suited for settlement. In a letter to his father written on January 16, 1843 John stated that William believed that the land was far more suitable than any other he had seen in New Zealand. John wrote, "William has been there twice; he says it is different to any place he has seen in New Zealand. It is covered with rich waving grass, and clumps of trees among it; there is quite enough of wood for building houses, etc., and firing, and that is sufficient."⁵⁷ William arrived at Putaringamotu in February 1843 and set about building the first house.⁵⁸ John arrived shortly after and wrote to his father to declare that the land at Riccarton was the best he had seen thus far. He states that "[t]his is certainly by far the best place I have seen in New Zealand, and for squatters like ourselves no place could be better, as there is plenty of level land with good pasture for cattle of all descriptions, and many places where there is plenty of wood and water."⁵⁹ John continues, in this letter to his father, that the land was chosen at Putaringamotu because of the availability of essential natural resources. He wrote, "[t]he place where we are squatted has many advantages; there is a wood about 200 acres in extent at the back of our houses, and a river of water clearer than crystal running close past the front."⁶⁰ It is therefore clearly evident from John's letters as to why he and William decided to

⁵⁶ John Deans, 'John Deans to John Deans Sen., Nelson, 10th November, 1842,' *Pioneers of Canterbury: Deans Letters 1840-1854*, ed. by John Deans III (Dunedin: A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1938), 48.

⁵⁷ Deans, 'John Deans to John Deans Sen., Port Nicholson, 16th January, 1843,' 60.

⁵⁸ Deans, 'John Deans to John Deans Sen., Port Nicholson, 16th January, 1843,' 63.

⁵⁹ John Deans, 'John Deans to John Deans Sen., Potarigamutu, Port Cooper, 10th January, 1844,' *Pioneers of Canterbury: Deans Letters 1840-1854*, ed. by John Deans III (Dunedin: A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1938), 79.

⁶⁰ Deans, 'John Deans to John Deans Sen., Potarigamutu, Port Cooper, 10th January, 1844,' 79.

settle at Putaringamotu with wood from within the Bush being a significant factor. If the Bush had not been there it is probable that the brothers may have gone elsewhere to farm. The availability of clean water from the Otakaro River and flat land upon which to grow crops and graze animals were also significant factors which influenced the brother's choice of land. Putaringamotu therefore influenced the first pioneers of the Canterbury Plains and as a result played a significant role in the creation of the pioneering settlement.

Over the next seven years the brothers set about establishing themselves as the first successful pioneers of the Port Cooper Plains. The brothers established a successful farm at Putaringamotu, which they renamed Riccarton, shortly after their arrival. Riccarton was the name of the Parish where they originated from in Ayrshire, Scotland.⁶¹ They also renamed the Otakaro River, the Avon, after a river that ran alongside their grandfather's property in Lanarkshire, Scotland.⁶² It was quite common for Scottish migrants to impose familiar names on new, unfamiliar landscapes.⁶³ By imposing Scottish names upon the raw environment of the Port Cooper Plains, the Deans brothers were not only attesting to their Lowland Scottish origins, they were also creating something familiar, which would remind them of home, within a completely unfamiliar environment.⁶⁴ The renaming of the area also secured the Deans brothers place in the pioneering history of Canterbury.

⁶¹ John Deans, 'John Deans to John Deans Sen., Potarigamutu, Port Cooper, 20th January, 1849,' *Pioneers of Canterbury: Deans Letters 1840-1854*, ed. by John Deans III (Dunedin: A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1938), 137.

⁶² Deans, 'John Deans to John Deans Sen., Potarigamutu, Port Cooper, 20th January, 1849,' 137.

⁶³ Tom Brooking, 'Shaking out the Haggis: The special Scottish contribution to New Zealand history,' *The Heather and the Fern: Scottish migration and New Zealand settlement*, ed. by Tom Brooking and Jennie Coleman (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2003), 56.

⁶⁴ Deans, 'John Deans to John Deans Sen., Port Cooper, 20th January, 1849,' 137.

The brothers used the resources which were widely available to them, in order to establish their farm and home at Riccarton. Pit sawn timber was taken from the Bush in order to build the brother's cottage and farm buildings, whilst trees that had fallen as a result of the harsh north-westerly winds were used to build fences.⁶⁵ The Bush was not only extremely useful for building materials; it also provided a shelter-belt for the farm buildings. The brothers noted in their letters home to Scotland that the winters could be particularly harsh, especially on the open plains; the Bush therefore provided good shelter for stock from strong winds, snow and rain.⁶⁶ The close proximity of the Avon also meant that the brothers' stock and crops did not go without fresh water.⁶⁷ This abundance of water helped to further the farming success of the brothers, more than if they had settled on their previous land purchases in Wellington and Nelson where water was not as easily accessible. The availability of flat, open land also contributed to the success of Riccarton Farm. In a letter to his father in September 1843, William wrote of the suitability of the land for grazing stock and growing crops. He stated that there was, "perfectly level land [that] can be ploughed without previous clearing, and it is covered with luxuriant grass."⁶⁸ As evidence of the soil's fertility, in 1845, 130 pounds of high quality wool were produced from 28 sheep and by 1846 the brother's first crop of wheat yielded approximately 60 bushels per acre.⁶⁹ These large production quantities were a result of the brother's hard work and resilience as well as a testament to the quality of land at Riccarton. The natural resources

⁶⁵ Jane Deans, '16th December, 1886,' *Letters to my Grandchildren*, ed. by John Deans III (Christchurch: Cadsonbury Publications, 1995), 25.

⁶⁶ John Deans III, *Pioneers on Port Cooper Plains: The Deans Family of Riccarton and Homebush* (Christchurch: Simpson & Williams Limited, 1964), 29.

⁶⁷ Deans, 'John Deans to John Deans Sen., Potarigamutu, Port Cooper, 10th January, 1844,' 79-80.

⁶⁸ William Deans, 'Wm. Deans to John Deans, Sen., Wellington, 6th September, 1843,' *Pioneers of Canterbury: Deans Letters 1840-1854*, ed. by John Deans III (Dunedin: A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1938), 68.

⁶⁹ Deans, 'John Deans to John Deans Sen., Port Cooper, 28th September, 1845,' 90-91.

within the Bush and the use of the land around it to build and establish the farm of the first pioneers on the Canterbury Plains has secured the place of Riccarton Bush within the pioneering history of Canterbury. The Deans family continued to farm successfully at Riccarton until the early 1900s when the majority of the land was eventually subdivided and sold to the encroaching Christchurch settlement.



Figure 2. Watercolour painting by William Fox of the Deans brother's farm in the shadow of Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush, 1848.

[Source: William Fox, 'Riccarton. Messrs Deans' Station. Canterbury,' accessed September 20, 2015, <http://otago.ourheritage.ac.nz/items/show/5291>.]

Initially the brothers squatted at Putaringamotu/Riccarton, having been given permission to do so by government officials in 1843. Permission to squat on the Port Cooper Plains was a temporary allowance which would remain in place until a Crown licence was granted. This licence was necessary as a result of the Treaty of Waitangi which had given the Crown control over all native-land.⁷⁰ The brothers could therefore only buy land from the Government, rather than from the local Maori.⁷¹ However, in regards to the Port Cooper Plains, and particularly the

⁷⁰ Ogilvie, *Pioneers of the Plains*, 51.

⁷¹ Ogilvie, *Pioneers of the Plains*, 51.

brother's request for a Crown licence, the Government appeared unwilling to act with any sort of haste. A lease was eventually agreed upon and signed in December 1846 by the brothers, local Maori and the Government.⁷² This lease was signed as a result of William developing a good working relationship with Ngai Tuahuriri.⁷³ William respected their customs and traditions which he understood as a result of the time he spent interacting with Maori in the North Island.⁷⁴ While stationed in Port Nicholson, following his arrival in New Zealand, William traded with the local Maori and was able to learn their language and gain an understanding of their culture.⁷⁵ It was this understanding which endeared William to Ngai Tuahuriri and in 1845 the spokesman for the local Maori, Te One Te Uki of Kaiapoi, contacted Major Mathew Richmond, the superintendent of the Southern District of New Zealand, asking that the Deans brothers be able to negotiate a lease with Ngai Tuahuriri.⁷⁶ Richmond finally agreed and a lease was eventually signed by 14 Ngai Tahu leaders on December 3, 1846.⁷⁷ This lease stated that the brothers would pay eight pounds per annum for six miles in every direction.⁷⁸ This equated to 33,000 acres and was to be theirs for 21 years.⁷⁹ William's relationship with Maori was an important factor that enabled the brothers to remain on the Port Cooper Plains and continue to farm successfully.

This extensive lease was eventually rescinded in 1850 with the arrival of the First Four Ships of pilgrims for the Canterbury Association's settlement on the Port

⁷² Deed of Lease, December 3, 1846, Canterbury Museum, accessed June 18, 2015.

⁷³ Deans, 'Wm. Deans to John Deans, Sen., Wellington, 6th September, 1843,' 70.

⁷⁴ Deans, 'John Deans to Gavin Brackenridge, Port Nicholson, 16th January, 1843,' 56.

⁷⁵ Deans, 'John Deans to Gavin Brackenridge, Port Nicholson, 16th January, 1843,' 56.

⁷⁶ Mathew Richmond, 'Major Richmond to William and John Deans, Wellington, 23rd August, 1845,' *Pioneers of Canterbury: Deans Letters 1840-1854*, ed. by John Deans III (Dunedin: A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1938), 90.

⁷⁷ Deed of Lease.

⁷⁸ Deed of Lease.

⁷⁹ Deed of Lease.

Cooper Plains. In 1848, the New Zealand Company purchased from local Maori the majority of land along the east coast of the South Island.⁸⁰ This purchase was known as Kemp's Deed; having being orchestrated by Henry Kemp who negotiated with local Maori on behalf of the Crown.⁸¹ This purchase of land left the brother's native lease in doubt and they wrote to the New Zealand Company to propose that they keep 1000 acres at Riccarton, which would be paid for through land orders and approximately 600 pounds.⁸² Colonel William Wakefield, who was the New Zealand Company's principal agent in New Zealand, approved the proposal for the 1000 acres at Riccarton.⁸³ However, Wakefield's unexpected death shortly afterwards once again held up proceedings and eventually the proposal for 1000 acres was abandoned in favour of a proposal for 400 acres.⁸⁴ This second proposal was accepted by William Fox, who became the acting principal agent following Wakefield's death.⁸⁵ Fox granted the brothers 400 acres for which they exchanged their land orders in Wellington and Nelson.⁸⁶ The brother's native lease was eventually honoured by John Robert Godley and the Canterbury Association which allowed them to select a block of 33,000 acres further inland.⁸⁷ This run was called Homebush and eventually became the Deans family's primary farm block. Within the agreement the brothers also handed over

⁸⁰ Ogilvie, *Pioneers of the Plains*, 51.

⁸¹ Ogilvie, *Pioneers of the Plains*, 51.

⁸² 'Proposed draft letter to the Secretary of New Zealand Company,' *Pioneers of Canterbury: Deans Letters 1840-1854*, ed. by John Deans III (Dunedin: A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1938), 130.

⁸³ William Wakefield, 'W. Wakefield to Wm. and John Deans, Wellington, 5th September, 1848,' *Pioneers of Canterbury: Deans Letters 1840-1854*, ed. by John Deans III (Dunedin: A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1938), 132.

⁸⁴ Jane Deans, 'Riccarton, 16th December, 1885,' *Letters to my Grandchildren*, third edn., ed. by John Deans III (Christchurch: Cadsonbury Publications, 1995), 9.

⁸⁵ Ogilvie, *Pioneers of the Plains*, 54.

⁸⁶ William Deans and John Deans, 'W. and J. Deans to the Colonial Secretary,' *Pioneers of Canterbury: Deans Letters 1840-1854*, ed. by John Deans III (Dunedin: A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1938), 151.

⁸⁷ 'Canterbury Association to J. R. Godley, Canterbury Association, 9 Adelphi Terrace, 2nd January, 1852,' *Pioneers of Canterbury: Deans Letters 1840-1854*, ed. by John Deans III (Dunedin: A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1938), 198-199.

half of the Bush to the New Zealand Company which was to be used by the new settlers of the Port Cooper Plains.⁸⁸ The agreement stated that, “Messrs Deans [are] to have one half of the bush near their house, but the timber and bush on the last mentioned portion to be the property of the New Zealand Company or their assignee, to be cleared at their discretion.”⁸⁹

The Port Cooper Plains were selected by the Canterbury Association following a visit to the area by Captain Joseph Thomas. Thomas was employed by the Canterbury Association as chief surveyor to find a suitable area of land for their future settlement.⁹⁰ Thomas arrived on the Port Cooper Plains in December 1848 along with William Fox, Thomas Cass and Charles Torlesse.⁹¹ The surveying party gravitated towards the Deans brothers as they were the only white settlers on the Plains at this time. The party spent Christmas with the brothers and purchased meat and vegetables from them during their two month stay.⁹² Thomas saw the brothers’ success at Riccarton as a testament to how well Canterbury’s first pioneers were doing within the colony and he believed that their position on the Plains, beside the Bush, was a major contributor to their success. He therefore saw the Bush to be an important asset to a new pioneering settlement. Thomas asked William to prepare a report, which would be sent back to the Canterbury Association, attesting to the suitability of the land for a settlement, as

⁸⁸ ‘Memorandum signed on behalf of the New Zealand Company and the Canterbury Association by Wm. Fox and Captain Thomas,’ 25th December, 1848, Canterbury Museum, accessed June 18, 2015.

⁸⁹ ‘Memorandum signed on behalf of the New Zealand Company.’

⁹⁰ William Deans and John Deans, ‘Wm. and John Deans to John Deans, Sen, Putaringamotu, 21st December, 1848,’ *Pioneers of Canterbury: Deans Letters 1840-1854*, ed. by John Deans III (Dunedin: A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1938), 134.

⁹¹ Deans and Deans, ‘Wm. and John Deans to John Deans, Sen, Putaringamotu, 21st December, 1848,’ 134.

⁹² William Deans and John Deans, ‘Wm. and John Deans to John Deans, Sen, Putaringamotu, 4th January, 1848,’ *Pioneers of Canterbury: Deans Letters 1840-1854*, ed. by John Deans III (Dunedin: A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1938), 134-135.

well as the brother's own experiences at Riccarton.⁹³ William's report, of approximately 3000 words, answered a number of questions asked by Thomas regarding the types of stock and crops that thrived on the Plains.⁹⁴ The final paragraph of this report summarises what the brother's thought of the Plains. It reads, "[h]aving visited all the New Zealand Company's settlements, and after considerable experience in England as farmers, and for the last nine years in New Zealand, we can with some confidence congratulate you on being able to secure this district as the sight of the Canterbury settlement. We do not believe a suitable site could ever have been secured elsewhere in the Company's territory."⁹⁵ The brothers' success beside the Bush therefore played a significant role in the decision to choose the Port Cooper Plains as the site for Canterbury. Therefore, the Bush can be seen as being a site of importance within the pioneering history of Christchurch.

The Settlement of Christchurch in the Shadow of Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush

With a site for the Canterbury Association's settlement chosen, Thomas and his group of surveyors set about mapping out the town in preparation for the arrival of the first Church of England pilgrims in 1850. The first ship to arrive, bringing Canterbury Association settlers to the Port Cooper Plains, was the *Charlotte Jane* which arrived at Lyttelton on November 7, 1850.⁹⁶ As Riccarton was the only established area with white European inhabitants, on what was now called the

⁹³ William Deans and John Deans, 'Report on conditions on the Plains, in reply to Captain Thomas, Riccarton, near Port Cooper,' 20th January, 1849, Riccarton Bush Trust, accessed August 18, 2015.

⁹⁴ Deans and Deans, 'Report on conditions on the Plains.'

⁹⁵ Deans and Deans, 'Report on conditions on the Plains.'

⁹⁶ C. R. Straubel, 'Maori and European to 1850,' *A History of Canterbury: Volume 1 – To 1854*, ed. by James Hight and C. R. Straubel (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs Limited, 1957), 130.

Canterbury Plains, the pilgrims gravitated towards the brothers and the Bush. At Riccarton the pilgrims received fresh food and shelter for the night.⁹⁷ Jane Deans later wrote of how the brother's housekeeper, Mary Tod, coped with the influx of settlers. Tod was required to feed the pilgrims upon their arrival and at times up to four sheep were needed.⁹⁸ The extent to which the brothers supported the pilgrims was not restricted to the days following their arrival. The brothers also provided the new settlers with fresh meat and vegetables until they had established their own gardens.⁹⁹

The brothers also provided the pilgrims with timber for building from within the half of the Bush that they had given to the New Zealand Company.¹⁰⁰ Accordingly the Bush proved to be a valuable resource in helping to build the first houses on the Canterbury Plains. This half of the Bush was cut down within two years of the pilgrim's arrival, with the only other remaining area of Bush on the plains, at Papanui, being cut down by 1861.¹⁰¹ It therefore became incredibly important for the Deans brothers, particularly John, to ensure that the half of the Bush which remained in their possession was protected. William and John not only recognised the significance of the Bush in regards to its influence on them to make Putaringamotu their home, but they also recognised its ecological significance. The brothers, in a number of letters to their father, stated that the Plains had once been covered with Bush not long before their arrival and that the piece which they possessed at Riccarton was just a small remnant of this.¹⁰² The success of the

⁹⁷ Deans, 'Riccarton, 16th December, 1885,' 10.

⁹⁸ Deans, 'Riccarton, 16th December, 1885,' 10.

⁹⁹ Deans, 'John Deans to Gavin Brackenridge, Port Nicholson, 16th January, 1843,' 55.

¹⁰⁰ 'Memorandum signed on behalf of the New Zealand Company.'

¹⁰¹ Jane Deans, '16th December, 1887,' *Letters to my Grandchildren*, third edn., ed. by John Deans III (Christchurch: Cadsonbury Publications, 1995), 36.

¹⁰² Deans, 'John Deans to John Deans Sen., Port Cooper, 28th September, 1845,' 91.

brothers at Riccarton was both an inspiration and a gravitational force for the Canterbury Association's settlement of Christchurch. If the brothers had been unsuccessful in their farming endeavours then it is more than likely that the Canterbury Association would have settled elsewhere rather than on the Port Cooper Plains. Captain Thomas was drawn towards the Bush and inspired by the success of the pioneering Deans brothers when he visited the Plains to select a site for the new settlement. It was for these reasons that the pilgrims, who arrived on the First Four Ships in 1850 and 1851, also gravitated towards Riccarton. The pilgrims were inspired by what the brothers had carved out of the wilderness and believed that it was possible for them as well.

The Deans Family Home at Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush

Descendants of the brothers continued to call Riccarton home until the 1930s. Both William and John died at the age of 34; William was drowned in a shipwreck off the coast of Wellington in 1851, while John passed away from tuberculosis in 1854.¹⁰³ John left behind his widow, Jane McIlraith, and his young son, John II. Women at this time could not inherit land, so Riccarton and Homebush were placed into a Trust until John II came of age.¹⁰⁴ Jane took it upon herself to manage the two farms and protect what her husband had worked hard to secure.¹⁰⁵ Jane set about building the first proper homestead at Riccarton which was completed in 1856.¹⁰⁶ The house was completed for approximately 550 pounds by the builders, James Johnson and Sons.¹⁰⁷ The house was constructed

¹⁰³ *The Lyttelton Times*, 1 July, 1854, cited in *Pioneers of Canterbury: Deans Letters 1840-1854*, ed. by John Deans III. Dunedin: A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1938., and Deans, '16th December, 1885,' 280.

¹⁰⁴ Deans, '16th December, 1885,' 21.

¹⁰⁵ Deans, '16th December, 1886,' 24.

¹⁰⁶ Deans, '16th December, 1886,' 25.

¹⁰⁷ Deans, '16th December, 1886,' 25.

from timber found within the Bush. The pit sawn timber on the exterior walls was Matai, whilst the flooring and roof shingles were made from Kahikatea.¹⁰⁸ A second addition to the house was built in 1874 in celebration of John II's 21st birthday.¹⁰⁹ The final stage was completed in 1901 and was overseen by John II in conjunction with local architects, the 'England Brothers.'¹¹⁰ This final stage included features such as oak panelling and double verandas which added to the grandeur of the house and are a testament to how successful the Deans family were. The large living and dining areas at the front of the house also attested to the family's reputation as being incredibly hospitable.¹¹¹ This focus on hospitality heralded back to the brother's own generosity towards the pilgrims who arrived on the First Four Ships.¹¹² The use of timbers from the Bush further connects the Deans family to the area and more specifically to the Bush itself.

Jane remained at Riccarton until her death in 1911, whilst her daughter-in-law Catherine was the last member of the Deans family to live at Riccarton until her death in 1937.¹¹³ Putaringamotu/Riccarton was therefore the home of the Deans family for 94 years, with the land surrounding the homestead being farmed by the family for approximately 60 years. Riccarton Bush was an extremely significant part of the Deans family history; it is what drew the brothers to this particular area on the Port Cooper Plains. It can therefore be associated with the family, their successful farm and the home that the brothers and Jane created for future generations. If it had not been for the Bush, it is more than likely that the brothers would have gone elsewhere to establish their farm. This would have deprived

¹⁰⁸ Deans, '16th December, 1886,' 25.

¹⁰⁹ Deans, '16th December, 1887,' 69.

¹¹⁰ Vicky Heward, *Christchurch Heritage Houses* (Christchurch: The Caxton Press, 2004), 51.

¹¹¹ Heward, *Christchurch Heritage Houses*, 51.

¹¹² Deans, 'John Deans to Gavin Brackenridge, Port Nicholson, 16th January, 1843,' 55.

¹¹³ Ogilvie, *Pioneers of the Plains*, 262.

Canterbury, not only of one of its most successful pioneering families, but also of the Canterbury settlement itself. Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush therefore holds a significant place within the pioneering and colonial history of Canterbury. If the brothers had not come to Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush and succeeded in their endeavours then the settlement of Canterbury may have gone elsewhere regarding the Plains as unsuitable and hostile for a successful settlement.

According to A. H. Reid, “[w]hen the Pilgrims first set foot on these plains some of them felt their hearts sink with despair. It was then that the little Deans homestead with its cattle and sheep, cornfields, fruit and vegetable gardens, gave them a vision of what might be done by hard work, and inspired them in their resolve to transform the wilderness into a fruitful land.”¹¹⁴

Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush was a significant place for the Deans family, the Canterbury Association and the settlers who arrived in 1850 to call Christchurch home. The Bush provided natural resources which were invaluable to the establishment of the Deans brothers’ farm and to the settlement of Christchurch. Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush is a place of significance to Canterbury’s pioneering history as it influenced the first pioneers, the Deans brothers, to establish their farm within the colony on the Port Cooper Plains. In turn the brother’s pioneering success inspired the Canterbury Association to select the Port Cooper Plains as the future settlement for the city of Christchurch. It is probable that had the Deans brothers not settled on the Plains in the shadow of the Bush, then the settlement of Christchurch may have been elsewhere. The resources that the brothers provided were invaluable to the new settlers and the settlement of Christchurch. According to C. R. Straubel “if that 30-ton schooner

¹¹⁴ A. H. Reid, *The Story of New Zealand*, cited in Jim Hewitson, *Far off in Sunlit Places: Stories of the Scots in Australia and New Zealand* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1998), 48.

had not come to Banks Peninsula in 1843, bringing William Deans to establish his farm on what were then described as the 'Plains of Cooks Mistake,' the First Four Ships would probably have gone elsewhere in 1850."¹¹⁵ Straubel therefore believes that "[t]he outstanding results achieved at Riccarton by the Deans brothers proved the suitability of the Plains for farming, ultimately determining the selection of the district as the site for the Canterbury settlement."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ C. R. Straubel, *The Schooner Richmond and Canterbury's First Farmers* (Wellington: The Rigamont Press, 1948), 1.

¹¹⁶ Straubel, *The Schooner Richmond*, 1948), 1.

Chapter Three: The Journey to Native Bush Reserve

The significance of Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush to the city of Christchurch is most clearly illustrated in the latter part of its history when it became a public reserve. It was at this point that Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush secured its place for all time in the environmental, pioneering and heritage pages of Canterbury's history. The ongoing conservation and preservation of Riccarton Bush and House ensures that every facet of the Bush's history in regards to the environment, Maori, pioneering and heritage are fully acknowledged and appreciated by the people of Canterbury and visitors to the area. It was the wish of John Deans I that the remaining Bush was preserved for eternity as an area which told the story of the people and city of Christchurch.

John Deans' Dying Wish

John Deans I passed away at Riccarton on June 23rd 1854 after being struck down with tuberculosis.¹¹⁷ Upon his deathbed, John made a request of his wife, Jane, which would shape the landscape of the Canterbury plains and secure the Deans family's pioneering history. John asked that what remained of the Bush be preserved in perpetuity and that it should be made available for the public's enjoyment.¹¹⁸ Jane therefore set about fulfilling her late-husband's wishes and believed that it was his dreams of preserving the Bush which kept her going, especially during times of great difficulty.¹¹⁹ In her letters to her grandchildren Jane explained how important her husband's wishes were to her. She stated,

¹¹⁷ *The Lyttelton Times*, 280.

¹¹⁸ Jane Deans, 'Canterbury Past and Present,' *The New Zealand Country Journal*, vol. 6, no. 6, compilation ed. by the Committee of the Canterbury Agricultural and Pastoral Association (Christchurch: M. Murphy F.L.S., Sec. A & P Association, 1882), 392.

¹¹⁹ Deans, 'Riccarton, 16th December, 1885,' 23.

“[t]hough lonely enough, I did not sit down and mope. I had a mission in life to carry out, or see carried out – the wishes and intentions of your grandfather, both in respect of your father personally, and also in respect of the property left in charge of myself.”¹²⁰ John Deans I has therefore been credited as being one of New Zealand’s first conservationists despite the fact that he passed away before any significant conservation work was performed within the Bush. However, it was his forethought that the Bush was significant and that it needed protecting that has resulted in a piece of Christchurch’s environmental history being preserved into the present day. While alive John did take some measures to protect the Bush the most significant of which was the planting of a border of English oak trees.¹²¹ These exotic trees were planted after 1851 when the settler’s half of the Bush had been cut down as John was concerned that strong winds would damage the remaining half of the Bush.¹²² Following John’s death, Jane also planted a number of exotic trees around the Bush in order to protect the trees which were “not planted by the hand of man.”¹²³ Jane stated that she enjoyed working outdoors and planting the trees herself, a skill which she had learnt from her father.¹²⁴ Jane’s father was a keen gardener back in Scotland and she claimed that he had “changed the whole face of the country” through the planting of trees.¹²⁵ Jane also describes her husband, John, as a man who changed the environment through his planting, even though he only lived to accomplish half of it.¹²⁶ These exotic trees, which bordered the Bush, were eventually cut down and replaced with

¹²⁰ Deans, ‘16th December, 1886,’ 25.

¹²¹ *Riccarton Bush Reserve Management Plan October 1991*, 20.

¹²² Deans, ‘16th December, 1887,’ 37.

¹²³ Deans, ‘16th December, 1887,’ 37.

¹²⁴ Deans, ‘16th December, 1886,’ 27.

¹²⁵ Deans, ‘16th December, 1886,’ 27.

¹²⁶ Deans, ‘16th December, 1886,’ 27.

broad-leaved trees which are native to the Bush.¹²⁷ The removal of the exotic trees reflects John I's wish for the Bush to be preserved in as original condition as possible. Jane further carried out her late-husband's wishes by ensuring that only fallen trees were used for firewood and the building of fences.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, trees from the Bush were used to build Riccarton House however; the trees used were plentiful enough that their limited use for this purpose never threatened the overall fabric of the Bush.¹²⁹ Jane and John I's work to preserve this piece of Christchurch's environmental history was relatively effective, however it was not until the introduction of the Riccarton Bush Trust in 1914 that the conservation of the reserve became more systematic and as a result far more successful.

The Deans' Gift to the People of Christchurch

In 1914 the Bush, consisting of 15 acres, was "gifted to the Mayor of Christchurch as the representative of the people of Canterbury," by the Deans family.¹³⁰ John Deans III, John Deans I's grandson, was instrumental in the gifting of the Bush to the city of Christchurch, finally fulfilling the wish of his grandfather by ensuring the preservation of the Bush for the people of Canterbury.¹³¹ The Riccarton Bush Act 1914 was passed by Parliament and set out the conditions upon which the Bush was gifted to the people of Christchurch.¹³² It stated that the property "shall be used and kept for all time for the preservation and cultivation of trees and plants indigenous to New Zealand."¹³³ The Act set out that the Bush was to be placed into the management of a Board of Trustees, known as the Riccarton Bush

¹²⁷ *Riccarton Bush Reserve Management Plan October 1991*, 20.

¹²⁸ Deans, 'Canterbury Past and Present,' 392.

¹²⁹ *Riccarton Bush Reserve Management Plan October 1991*, 20.

¹³⁰ *Riccarton Bush Act 1914*, 'Preamble,' 3.

¹³¹ *Riccarton Bush Act 1914*, 'Preamble,' 2.

¹³² *Riccarton Bush Act 1914*, 'Preamble,' 1.

¹³³ *Riccarton Bush Act 1914*, 'Preamble,' 2.

Trust.¹³⁴ The main function of the Trust was to “ensure that the Riccarton Bush is run effectively and efficiently.”¹³⁵ In order to perform this function the Trust was given the power to instate a number of by-laws which dictated how and when the Bush could be used by the public.¹³⁶ The first set of by-laws which were issued in May 1917, shortly after the Bush was officially opened to the public, stated that the Bush was to be open from one o’clock in the afternoon until sunset.¹³⁷ They also detailed how people were expected to behave whilst walking through the Bush. No fires were to be lit, no children could enter unless accompanied by a responsible adult and people had to keep to the paths provided.¹³⁸ Each of these by-laws were created with the preservation and protection of the Bush in mind, with the most important by-law stating that “[n]o person shall injure any tree, shrub, fern or plant, or in any way do damage to the Bush.”¹³⁹ The Act and by-laws ensured that John I’s wish and the conditions upon which the Bush was gifted to the city were fulfilled.

Conservation and Preservation of Riccarton Bush and House

Riccarton Bush was formally opened to the public by the Governor of New Zealand, Lord Liverpool, on the 24th of February, 1917.¹⁴⁰ The delay in the opening of the Bush to the public was due to the fact that there were a number of alterations which needed to take place within the Bush itself so that it could be effectively conserved whilst also being enjoyed by the public. A ranger’s cottage was built in the shadow of the Bush during 1916 to provide housing for the ranger,

¹³⁴ *Riccarton Bush Act 1914*, ‘Terms of Office of Members of Board,’ 4.

¹³⁵ *Riccarton Bush By-Laws*, May 29, 1917.

¹³⁶ *Riccarton Bush Act 1914*, ‘Powers of Board,’ 11.

¹³⁷ *Riccarton Bush By-Laws*.

¹³⁸ *Riccarton Bush By-Laws*.

¹³⁹ *Riccarton Bush By-Laws*.

¹⁴⁰ ‘Riccarton Bush: The Opening Ceremony,’ *Sun*, 24 February 1917, 2. Available from: PapersPast, accessed August 20, 2015.

John Tickell, who was appointed in 1914 by the Trust.¹⁴¹ Tickell took it upon himself to ensure that the ecological significance of the Bush was protected and that it was explained to visitors when he acted as a guide once the Bush was formally opened.¹⁴² The Bush's ranger was extremely important in ensuring that the conditions within the Bush were adequate for the regeneration of the native plants.¹⁴³ Fences were also erected around the Bush in order to protect it from vandalism and theft, whilst permanent tracks were created to ensure that visitors did not stray into the Bush and harm young plants.¹⁴⁴ Upon officially opening the Bush, Lord Liverpool outlined the importance of the area and the need to preserve all native flora within New Zealand.¹⁴⁵ Lord Liverpool placed a great deal of emphasis on the significance of the Bush in regards to its position as a piece of Canterbury's environmental history. John Deans III, who was Chairman of the Trust, also spoke to the crowds about the history of the Bush and his family's pioneering connection to it over the past 74 years.¹⁴⁶ By emphasising the significance of the Bush in regards to its place within the environmental and pioneering history of Christchurch it was hoped that the people of Canterbury would take it upon themselves to ensure that everything within their power was done to ensure its protection. The opening of the Bush to the public signalled a turning point in its history. It was no longer a wilderness which was solely used for its resources, it had instead transformed into a native reserve which was open for the public to enjoy. This watershed moment in its history secured the Bush as a

¹⁴¹ Wall, *The Riccarton Bush*, 5.

¹⁴² Wall, *The Riccarton Bush*, 5.

¹⁴³ 'Riccarton Bush: Inspection of the Reserve,' *The Press*, 20 February, 1934, 17. Available from: PapersPast, accessed August 20, 2015.

¹⁴⁴ Andrew Thompson, 'The Riccarton Bush Reserve,' *Riccarton Bush: Putaringamotu – Natural History and Management* ed. by Brian Molloy (Christchurch: The Caxton Press, 1995), 27.

¹⁴⁵ 'Riccarton Bush: The Opening Ceremony,' 2.

¹⁴⁶ 'Riccarton Bush: The Opening Ceremony,' 2.

significant place in Christchurch where people could go to enjoy its natural beauty and fully appreciate the significance of the native Bush. The opening of the Bush acknowledged its place within Christchurch's history with regards to its environmental significance, as well as its importance to the city's pioneering beginnings. The historical significance of the Bush and its place as a conservation area for the public to visit and enjoy was furthered in 1947 with the purchase of Riccarton House and its surrounding gardens.



Figure 3. Aerial photograph of Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush, 2015.

[Source: Google Maps, accessed September 20, 2015, <https://www.google.co.nz/maps/search/riccarton+bush/@-43.5277763,172.5946431,556m/data=!3m1!1e3.>]

In 1947 the Deans family decided to sell the House and surrounding gardens to the Christchurch City Council following Catherine's death in 1937.¹⁴⁷ Riccarton House and the associated 13 acres were purchased from the family for 16,500 pounds.¹⁴⁸ The purchase of the House and gardens resulted in an amendment being made to the 1914 Act which extended the powers of the Trust to incorporate

¹⁴⁷ Thompson, 'The Riccarton Bush Reserve,' 27.

¹⁴⁸ Thompson, 'The Riccarton Bush Reserve,' 27.

the management of the House and gardens.¹⁴⁹ In 1949 a further Amendment Act was passed which gave the Trust the power to lease out the House as a function centre.¹⁵⁰ From the 1950s until the early 1990s there was an emphasis on the commercial potential of the House and as a result the Bush and House were not conserved or protected as well as they should have been. The focus moved away from creating an open, historically and ecologically significant site as the Deans family had wished. Rather, the House was only available to the clubs who used it as a function centre, whilst the Bush, while still being protected, with regards to the native flora, fell into disuse by the public.¹⁵¹

It was not until the early 1990s that the Trust began to place more emphasis on the conservation of the Bush.¹⁵² It was hoped that by returning the Bush to its original state, making alterations to the walking tracks and adding interpretative panels to provide information, that the Bush would once again become a place that was widely used and enjoyed by the public.¹⁵³ By re-emphasising the importance of the Bush within the environmental history of Christchurch the Trust believed that they could reinvigorate people's interest in this unique place. In 1991 a 62-page conservation plan was adopted by the Trust. This plan incorporated the submissions of 50 organisations and individuals who advised the Trust as to how best to ensure the conservation and preservation of the Bush and House.¹⁵⁴

Three main management goals were adopted as a result of the proposals put forward by these organisations and individuals. Each of these goals echoed the dying wish of John I, as they placed significant emphasis on the ecological

¹⁴⁹ *Riccarton Bush Amendment Act 1947*, 'Preamble,' 1.

¹⁵⁰ *Riccarton Bush Amendment Act 1949*, 'Preamble,' 1.

¹⁵¹ *Riccarton Bush Reserve Management Plan October 1991*, 35.

¹⁵² *Riccarton Bush Reserve Management Plan October 1991*, 34.

¹⁵³ *Riccarton Bush Reserve Management Plan October 1991*, 34.

¹⁵⁴ *Riccarton Bush Reserve Management Plan October 1991*, 61.

conservation of the area. This is not surprising given that a number of submissions were made by descendants of John Deans I.¹⁵⁵ These goals which were agreed upon by the Trust were; “[to] protect and enhance the indigenous flora, fauna and ecology of the Bush; [to] conserve Deans Cottage, Riccarton House and their grounds with Riccarton Bush and the Deans family history; [and to] encourage public use and participation of the reserve and to inform visitors about the natural Maori and colonial heritage of Christchurch.”¹⁵⁶ In response to these management goals a number of smaller objectives and policies were adopted in order to achieve the Trust’s targets.

In order to fulfil the first of the management’s goals a number of policies were put in place to protect the Bush. These policies included such things as organising a fire protection plan, halting mowing within the Bush itself to allow for the regeneration of smaller plants and the careful weeding of exotic plants which were considered to be harmful to the Bush’s native flora.¹⁵⁷ A new boundary fence was also erected by the Trust to protect the Bush from vandalism and unlawful entry.¹⁵⁸ In order to meet the goal which focussed on the public’s use of the Bush the Trust implemented a number of policies to encourage people to visit. These included the creation of picnic areas within the original gardens of the House, as well as more permanent walking tracks within the Bush itself which would allow the Bush to be used throughout the year.¹⁵⁹ It was also decided that Riccarton House should be restored as close to its original state as possible. When the Riccarton Bush Amendment Act 1949 was enacted the Trust had the ability to rent

¹⁵⁵ *Riccarton Bush Reserve Management Plan October 1991*, 61.

¹⁵⁶ *Riccarton Bush Reserve Management Plan October 1991*, 49.

¹⁵⁷ *Riccarton Bush Reserve Management Plan October 1991*, 52-53.

¹⁵⁸ *Riccarton Bush Reserve Management Plan October 1991*, 59.

¹⁵⁹ *Riccarton Bush Reserve Management Plan October 1991*, 31 and 34.

Riccarton House out for commercial purposes.¹⁶⁰ The House was turned into a function centre where a variety of clubs held meetings and fundraising events.¹⁶¹ In order to cater to these commercial operations a number of alterations were made to the house.¹⁶² These alterations included the conversion of the upstairs bedrooms into meeting rooms, the installation of a commercial kitchen and the adaption of the 1900s kitchen into a living space for a caretaker.¹⁶³ Each of these alterations dramatically changed the original fabric of the House and erased many of the heritage features which connected the House to the Bush and the Deans family. It was not until 1991 that the conservation and preservation of the House took priority over commercial ventures. Under the Reserve Management Plan the House was to “be restored and maintained as near as practicable to [its] original condition.”¹⁶⁴ By restoring the house to its original condition it could be opened up, in part, as a museum which would allow more access for the public whilst still generating some revenue.¹⁶⁵ The Trust believed that by opening up the House to the public it would also encourage more people to visit the Bush as they would take a guided tour of the House before venturing into the Bush for a nature walk.¹⁶⁶ By implementing these policies the Trust was returning to and fulfilling the conditions upon which it had been formed in 1914. These policies also ensured that the significance of the House and Bush to the pioneering history and heritage of the area were prioritised over commercial ventures. The Trust was expected to conserve and protect the Bush, and later the House, for the people of Christchurch. This new direction also reiterated the significance of the site to the

¹⁶⁰ *Riccarton Bush Amendment Act 1949*, ‘Preamble,’ 1.

¹⁶¹ *Riccarton Bush Reserve Management Plan October 1991*, 31.

¹⁶² Ogilvie, *Pioneers on the Plains*, 257.

¹⁶³ Ogilvie, *Pioneers on the Plains*, 257.

¹⁶⁴ *Riccarton Bush Reserve Management Plan October 1991*, 60.

¹⁶⁵ *Riccarton Bush Reserve Management Plan October 1991*, 58.

¹⁶⁶ *Riccarton Bush Reserve Management Plan October 1991*, 32.

city. By opening up the House for people to enjoy as well as making improvements within the Bush, the site once again became a meeting place for the people of Christchurch and for international visitors to the area, as it had been following its official opening in 1917.

Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush Today – Native Reserve and Tourist

Attraction

Riccarton House and Bush are now fully open to the public, however the Trust still believes that there is room for improvement in regards to the conservation and promotion of the area. According to the Trust public access has improved in the last ten years with the opening up of the House as a museum, café and wedding venue thus allowing more visitors to experience the history of the site.¹⁶⁷

However, the Trust believes that access is “still relatively low considering the natural and dual cultural significance of the Riccarton Bush property to Canterbury.”¹⁶⁸ The Trust recognises the significance of the Bush to a number of different facets of Christchurch’s history. These include its ability to tell the story of Maori and their use of Putaringamotu, as well as the history of the first pioneers of the Plains. The House itself also adds to the architectural heritage of the city and tells the story of the social and cultural practices of pioneering families during the nineteenth century. However, the most important area of Christchurch’s history that the Bush represents is the environment. The Bush has such a strong connection to the environmental history of Canterbury and as a result a great deal of emphasis is placed on the conservation of the area by the Trust. The Trust feel that it is their responsibility to acknowledge the significance of the Bush within

¹⁶⁷ *The Riccarton Bush/Putaringamotu Draft Management Plan 2015*, Riccarton Bush Trust, September 2, 2015, 6.

¹⁶⁸ *The Riccarton Bush/Putaringamotu Draft Management Plan 2015*, 6.

these different areas of Christchurch's history and to inform the public of the Bush's importance. The Trust is therefore focussed on ensuring that both the House and Bush are used to their full potential by the public, whilst also protecting these ecological and historical sites.

The management goals of the Trust have developed slightly since they were first instated in 1991. The goals now include the need to protect the mahinga kai and taonga species within the Bush, as well as to promote the Bush and House to the public.¹⁶⁹ This focus on the Maori significance of the site has become more important in recent years due to the realisation that Maori were generally left out of the Deans family history in relation to the Bush. This omission is a result of the white settler narrative which dictated how colonial histories have been remembered and written. However, the emphasis on the inclusion of Maori plant names as well as the telling of their history with regards to the Bush has ensured that visitors realise just how significant the Bush was to local Maori, their culture and their beliefs.¹⁷⁰ The focus on increasing the numbers of both local and international visitors to the site is also of great importance to the Trust. This is due to the fact that the Trust now believes that the significance of the Bush within the city, to some degree, is measured by the number of tourists who visit the area.¹⁷¹ Tourism is vital to the ongoing preservation and maintenance of the Bush and House as it provides revenue that is essential to the running of the property.¹⁷² The promotion of the House and Bush as a tourist attraction, as well as its use by locals as an increasingly popular picnic area and native reserve, illustrate just how

¹⁶⁹ *The Riccarton Bush/Putaringamotu Draft Management Plan 2015*, 16.

¹⁷⁰ *The Riccarton Bush/Putaringamotu Draft Management Plan 2015*, 16, 18, and 21.

¹⁷¹ *The Riccarton Bush/Putaringamotu Draft Management Plan 2015*, 22.

¹⁷² *The Riccarton Bush/Putaringamotu Draft Management Plan 2015*, 22.

significant the Bush remains to the City of Christchurch.¹⁷³ It provides the city with a conservation area within the city's boundaries which is used on a daily basis by locals as a meeting place, whilst also contributing to the city's tourism industry.

The wish of John Deans I and the gifting of Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush to the people of Christchurch has ensured that the Bush remains relevant and significant to the city. The Trust has worked hard to protect and conserve the area of native Bush and recognises the significance of the Bush to the history of Christchurch. The Trust therefore acknowledges Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush's connection to Canterbury's environmental, Maori, pioneering and heritage history. The transformation of the Bush from a wilderness to a native reserve has also ensured that it remains significant within Christchurch both as a tourist attraction and as a meeting place for locals.



Figure 4. Riccarton House in its current state as a museum, café and wedding venue.

[Source: Jock Phillips, accessed September 20, 2015, <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/photograph/10211/riccarton-house.>]

¹⁷³ Riccarton Bush Trust, 'Riccarton House & Bush – Putaringamotu,' 2015 promotional leaflet.

Conclusion

The significance of Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush to Canterbury has not faltered during its transformation from a wilderness to a native bush reserve. The area remains significant to the people and city of Christchurch today as a result of the connections that the Bush has with various facets of Christchurch's history.

Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush tells the story of Christchurch's environmental history due to its position as the only remaining area of Podocarp Swamp forest which at one time covered the Canterbury Plains. Putaringamotu also uncovers the history of Ngai Tahu and their cultural practices and beliefs.

However, perhaps the most important facet of Christchurch's history that the Bush is connected to is the area's pioneering history. If the Bush had not existed on the Port Cooper Plains then it is more than likely that Canterbury's first successful pioneering family, the Deans, would have gone elsewhere to farm within the colony. It was their success, within the shadow of the Bush, which then inspired the Canterbury Association to establish the city of Christchurch on the Plains. If the brothers had not settled at Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush it is probable that the settlement of Christchurch would have gone elsewhere in 1850. This in turn, would have meant that the pioneering history, which we know today, would probably not have existed as the Bush and therefore the Deans brothers would not have been present to draw the European settlers to the Plains in 1850.

Furthermore, the current use of the Bush, as a conservation area and meeting place continues to secure the area within the history and psyche of Christchurch.

Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush's influence on different areas of Christchurch's history and its ability to tell the story of Canterbury's environment, Maori culture

and pioneering history make it an extremely significant and important area both nationally and internationally.

Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush offers great insight into the relationship between the natural environment and the built environment. The Bush illustrates that the environment can influence how and where a settlement is established.

Putaringamotu/Riccarton Bush also demonstrates that if the environment is taken care of, rather than destroyed, it can become a place of true significance to a city, its history and the people who call it home.

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