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Edward Fitzgerald—pioneer, coach driver, shepherd, and rabitter¹: a very brief reflection

My extended whānau, Edward Fitzgerald's descendants, know very little about him. We know he was of Irish descent, and his death certificate notes that he was born in Tauranga to Tom Fitzgerald and Elizabeth Blackburn. His death certificate states that he died of chronic myocardial degeneration at Waiōhau at the age of 82. This very brief paper gathers the very few known strands of his history and merely describes what is known of him. This paper is published here in memory of him and to inspire whānau to continue searching for more information.

Koro Edward's name is carved into a pillar/obelisk headstone at Waiōhau urupā. As a child, I played around this stone; it was unusual in that it was probably one of the tallest monuments in the entire urupā. The use of the pillar/obelisk shape is interesting as it reflects Western design trends of the time, particularly that of monumentalism. The notion of monumentalism in headstone design was popular from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century (Hijiya, 1983; Robinson,

¹ These descriptions come directly from the *Obituary Mr Edward Fitzgerald* (Bay of Plenty Beacon, 1947b, p. 5).

2018). The intention of monumentalism was to highlight the importance of the deceased person's past life while drawing inspiration from other cultures, such as ancient Egypt and the classical Roman period (Hijiya, 1983; Robinson, 2018). The obelisk shape represented a sense of eternity—resisting the effects of time (Hijiya, 1983). Certainly, Koro Edward's monument remains in place for the small children of his descendants to climb on and play around, just as I had. While Koro Edward died in 1947, his memorial stone is evidence that the trend of monumentalism was still apparent. Looking even further back through history, what more can we know about Koro Edward Fitzgerald?

Owing to the Norman invasion of England in 1066, Norman expansionism changed south Wales's political landscape through the late 11th and 12th centuries (Johns, 2013). Princess Nest, daughter of Rhys ap Tewdwr, King of Deheubarth, wedded Gerald of Windsor around 1097 (Johns, 2013). The Fitzgerald family—symbolised by St Patrick's saltire—is the posterity of Nest and Gerald (Johns, 2013). The Fitzgerald dynasty acquired power in Ireland by way of Gerald's grandsons through the conquest of large tracks of Irish territory (Johns, 2013). The expression 'more Irish than the Irish themselves' is used in Irish historiography to convey the Gaelicisation that occurred in late medieval Norman Ireland (MacLysaght, 2006). The Irish Norman lords who had established themselves in Ireland founded septs and clans modelled on the established indigenous Gaelic design (MacLysaght, 2006; Palmer, 2001). Over numerous generations, they had become Gaelicised (Gibson, 2012).

As the English ruled Ireland from the 12th century, those Irish settlers who immigrated to Aotearoa New

Zealand in the 19th and early 20th centuries were British citizens (Phillips, 2015). There was a deep bitterness on the part of Irish Catholic peasants in Ireland concerning the Anglo-Irish protestants who seized their land, maintained power as landlords and reinforced English rule; by the 1860s, half of Ireland was in the hands of just 750 people, most of whom were Protestants (Phillips, 2015). This situation deteriorated because of land division by inheritance, the transfer of land used for crops into sheep and cattle farms, diminished work opportunities, and industrialisation, which extinguished the supplementary incomes acquired from domestic spinning and weaving (Phillips, 2015). In the 1840s and early 1850s, a dreadful potato famine killed over one million people (Ó Gráda, 1989; Phillips, 2015).

In the 1800s, mostly following the famine, the Irish left Ireland in search of better lives; from 1850 to the 1920s, the population of Ireland was halved as over one million Irish went to England or Scotland, and over four million went to America and, to a far lesser degree, Australasia (Phillips, 2015). The New Zealand Company offered assisted passages for settlement, but Irish Catholic peasants were not wanted, and less than two per cent of the company’s settlers were born in Ireland (Phillips, 2015). Anglo-Irish settlers were part of a privileged group of Protestants — an Anglican elite — who considered their positions back in Ireland inescapably compromised by Catholic liberation and Irish nationalism (Phillips, 2015).

Bishop Pomapallier from France and the Society of Mary established Roman Catholicism in Aotearoa New Zealand (Simmons, 1978). Nevertheless, as most Catholics in the 1860s were Irish, Catholicism

became “a major vehicle for expressing Irish heritage” (Phillips, 2015, n.p.). The appointments of Bishop Patrick Moran in 1869 and Bishop Thomas Croke in 1870 moved the Catholic Church in Aotearoa New Zealand closer to the ‘Catholic Empire’ of Ireland’s Cardinal Paul Cullen (Phillips, 2015; Simmons, 1978) who, as an Archbishop, extensively compelled the intensification of Irish Catholic religiosity (Lineham, 2017).

For Bishop Moran, Irish character and Catholicism were the same; Catholicism was undeniably focal to Irish life and identity in Aotearoa New Zealand (Phillips, 2015). Bishop Pompallier’s method was to visit as many Māori communities as possible, and Māori esteemed him for his tenacity (Simmons, 1978). A mission was founded in Tauranga in 1840, and by 1844 there were 12 stations, two of which were built at Whakatāne and Rotorua (Simmons, 1978), the closest stations to Murupara (Rangiwai, 2019). I would assume that Catholicism probably came to Murupara and Waiōhau via the stations at Whakatāne and Rotorua (Rangiwai, 2019).

My great-great-grandmother, Nanny Rangimaewa — Koro Edward’s daughter — was a devout Catholic (Rangiwai, 2019). Her discipline concerning fasting and praying the Rosary echo the austere Irish Catholic religiosity shaped by Cardinal Cullen in the 19th century (Rangiwai, 2019). Nanny Rangimaewa was of Ngāti Manawa descent (Rangiwai, 2019). Her mother was Riripeti — a daughter of the high chief, Peraniko and his union with Mamae, which can be traced in the following table (Rangiwai, 2019).

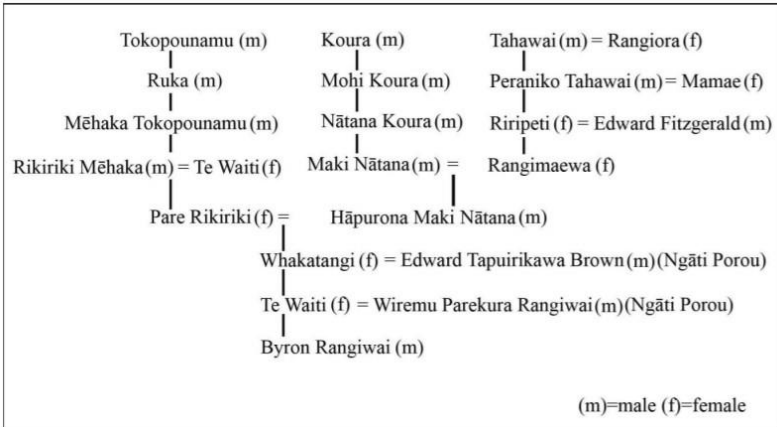


Figure 1: Whakapapa (Rangiwai, 2015, p. 2).

Koro Edward was part of the first wave of Pākehā to come to Murupara. Henry Tahawai Bird (1980), a late chief of Ngāti Manawa and descendent of Peraniko recalled: “Mr Fitzgerald married Riripeti, daughter of Peraniko and from this union they had two daughters, – the elder one Rangimaewa married Mr. Maki Natana of Waiōhau and had many children, the eldest [Hāpurona] Ted Maki being their leader” (p. 26).

My grandmother, Rēpora Marion Brown (nee Maki), also known as Whakatangi Rikiriki, was born in 1940 (Rangiwai, 2019). She described her great-grandfather, Edward Fitzgerald, as bedridden and frightening (Rangiwai, 2019). She said he spoke with a strong accent and rang a bell when he wanted something, but that when she would go in to see what he wanted, he would try to hit her with his cane! (Rangiwai, 2019). Although his death certificate says that he was born in Tauranga, I imagine his accent probably would have sounded quite different to what my grandmother was used to;

furthermore, as he spoke fluent Māori, he may have spoken te reo with an accent. His origins and the precise details of how his family came to live in Aotearoa New Zealand, and he in Murupara and Waiōhau, have remained quite mysterious (Rangiwai, 2019). Some clues, however, may be found in his obituary. Perhaps what brought Koro Edward to the Murupara and Waiōhau areas was employment?

OBITUARY

MR EDWARD FITZGERALD

It is with deep regret that we report the passing of Mr Edward Fitzgerald whose death occurred on Sunday at Waiahou, at the age of 82. The funeral which was attended by many took place at Waiohau on Tuesday. The graveside service was conducted by a Catholic Priest from Rotorua. Pall-bearers were Messrs. Benson, Dixon, Bungers, Maki, Turnbull and Cook all of whom had known the deceased for many years. Mr Fitzgerald is survived by his daughter Mrs Maki.

The passing of this pioneer is regretted by his many numerous friends throughout the area. It is interesting to recall that the deceased was one of the first coach drivers over the Rotorua-Wairoa route before roads were actually formed. For some years he was shepherd on the Galatea Estate and subsequently rabbitier for some 25 years in the district. He captained the first rabbit gang of some twenty-five men on the Kaingaroa Plains. His wife predeceased him by two years. Until only a few months ago he lived an active life.

Figure 2: Obituary Mr Edward Fitzgerald (Bay of Plenty Beacon, 1947b, p. 5)

We know that that Koro Edward purchased land in Waiōhau in 1921:

In 1921 Te Whaiti Paora sold Waiohau 1A9 block, an area of 18 acres, to Edward Fitzgerald for the sum of £40. Te Whaiti Paora had written to the Waiariki District Maori Land Board in August 1920 saying that the land was of no use to him as his kainga and cultivations were on the other side of the Rangitaiki River. He said that he needed the purchase money to improve his other landholdings and that because Fitzgerald had occupied the land for some years he was anxious to give him title to it (Arapere, 2002, p. 63).

Another interesting piece of history is a story from the Bay of Plenty Beacon describing an accident involving the priest who was travelling to Waiōhau to conduct Koro Edward’s funeral.

Car and Lorry Collide

A car driven by the Catholic Priest journeying to Waiahou for the funeral of the late Mr Edward Fitzgerald was involved in a collision with a logging truck driven by Mr Waugh, of Murupara. The truck belonged to Mr Terry London of Te Whaiti. The collision took place in the Bluff on the Whakatanu-Murupara Road. The Priest's car was severely damaged and was removed by a breakdown truck dispatched from Rotorua. The logging truck, although damaged, was off the road only one day. The priest after the accident walked some four miles to perform his religious duties. Considering the condition of the vehicles it is very fortunate that neither driver was hurt.

Figure 3: car and lorry collide (bay of plenty beacon, 1947ba, p. 4).

This paper represents the beginning of formally piecing together pieces of history to reveal more about our ancestor, Edward Fitzgerald. This short paper raises for me a number of questions:

- As Koro Edward was Catholic, did his immediate family come from the so-called undesirable Catholic peasantry that came to Aotearoa New Zealand in the 19th century?
- While the name Fitzgerald has noble Anglo-Norman beginnings, how does the Catholic line of the expansive Fitzgerald family fit into the history?
- How did Koro Edward's parents or grandparents come to settle in Aotearoa New Zealand and when?

It is hoped that more whānau researchers will add to the information contained here and begin to answer the abovementioned questions amongst the many other questions we have about our ancestor.

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