

## **FORT COLVILE: PUKEMAIRE REDOUBT – FROM EMILY KIRBY'S LETTERS, 1864-66**

### **Alister Matheson**

About May-June 1864, Major F.M. Colville was succeeded as commander of the troops at Maketu by Major J.H. Kirby. During the time Major Kirby was stationed at Tauranga and for the first 2 ½ months he was at Maketu his wife Emily, who had accompanied him to New Zealand, stayed in Auckland. About the middle of August 1864, however, she arrived in Tauranga. From an entry in the diary of Major C.W. Shuttleworth, also of the 68<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Major Kirby came from Maketu to Tauranga to meet her on 17 August. Five days later the Kirbys moved to Maketu, as the Maketu correspondent of the *Daily Southern Cross* reported on 22 August:

In the afternoon, Major Kirby and his lady arrived overland from Tauranga, and took up their quarters at Wharekahu, where, I believe, they remain until the Major's whare, which is in course of erection, is finished.

### **WHAREKAHU MISSION STATION**

The Kirbys "quarters at Wharekahu" were presumably the Wharekahu Mission Station premises. But for the pressures of the property market in Auckland, little more might have been known of Mrs Kirby's stay in Maketu. Although the Kirbys were sufficiently well off to continue paying a high rent for their unoccupied house in Auckland in the hope that they could keep it until the regiment returned there, and in the expectation of their making visits to that town from Maketu, the owner of the house put it up for sale. The Kirbys had then to remove all their belongings. But because her husband was unable to leave his post to attend to the matter, Mrs Kirby had to make immediate arrangements to travel to Auckland and place them in store.

In the circumstances of the times there was nowhere for Mrs Kirby to stay in Tauranga while waiting for a passage by ship to Auckland. Major Kirby accordingly wrote to Archdeacon Brown, of the Te Papa mission station, Tauranga, to ask if she might stay there. At the same time Mrs Kirby wrote to Mrs Christina Brown. As it turned out, Mrs Kirby was made welcome by the hospitable Browns, both on her way to Auckland and on her return, and this was the beginning of a warm and long-lasting friendship between the families (Emily Kirby's letters to Christina Brown are preserved in the A.N. Brown Collection at "The Elms", Tauranga).

### **VOYAGE BY SEA**

In January 1865, after her return to Maketu, Mrs Kirby wrote to Mrs Brown, giving an account of the unpleasant voyage from Tauranga:

We had a most uncomfortable voyage the day I left you the sea was very rough most part of the way, we arrived here about one o'clock, but could not get over the bar as the tide was out, so we were obliged to remain sailing backwards and forwards to Motiti till past seven OC – the evening, at last a Maori pilot came on board, and seemed very confident that he would take the vessel all right over the bar, which he did, but then unfortunately, he ran her on a sand bank just inside the bar, where we remained some time, I was very much frightened, as the vessel was bumping dreadfully, and I thought she would go to pieces every moment – several Maoris came on board, and an anchor having been put out, she was hauled off, we then got into the harbour and Major Kirby came off for me in a canoe, I need not tell you he is delighted to have me back here again he spent a very lonely time during my absence.

I have been very busy since I returned, unpacking and trying to make ourselves a little more comfortable in our Waree. Everything appears very quiet here I was glad to see Mr Kinder had returned today from the Lakes he has promised to come and spend this evening with us, and he says he intends to go to Tauranga tomorrow... I will ask him to take the seeds of the Australian White Lilac, which I promised you, and hope they grow for you as I heard it is very pretty.

Emily Kirby wrote to her Tauranga friend again on 24 January complaining of the trying weather and of being dreadfully tormented by sandflies, which did not give her a moment's rest. There were exaggerated reports that 2,000 Ngati Porou warriors were on their way to Maketu and had arrived at a place 12 miles to the east of it. Major Kirby, however, did not think they would come to Maketu but would perhaps "try to get some utu and steal some cattle from the Arawa's in the Lake District". Mrs Kirby thanked Mrs Brown for saving some kowhai seeds for her and mentioned a very pretty flowering shrub she had seen at "Mrs Smith's" (i.e. the Wharekahu Mission Station, where T.H. Smith, the Civil Commissioner for the Bay of Plenty, and his wife had lived for a time in early 1864).



**Major J.H. Kirby, 68<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry.**

**Mrs Emily Kirby.**

**Commander and wife of the garrison at Fort Colvile, Maketu from 1864 to 1866.**

**Photo: Durham Light Infantry Museum.**

**Photo: The Elms Foundation.**

#### **MATTERS OF INTEREST**

Referring to the Rev. J. Kinder's short stay in Maketu earlier that month Mrs Kirby wrote:

I would have liked it very much to have seen some of the views he had taken, but he said he would not be able to finish them till he went home.

The "views" Mr Kinder had taken would have been in the Rotorua district and Maketu. The latter could have been taken either on his way to Rotorua late in 1864 or on his return early in January 1865. Other matters of interest in Mrs Kirby's letter were:

Mr Smith arrived here on Saturday without his better half, I suppose she does not yet think it safe to come here... We are anxiously looking out for the English mail I hope we may get our letters tomorrow, as we have just seen a schooner going into Tauranga... there is no news to tell from here one day is exactly like another, but still I find a great deal to do, and have not had time to make some dresses which I bought in Auckland.

When Mrs Kirby wrote again on 1 March the Maketu people were apparently even more concerned than before about the possibility of an attack by the Ngati Porou:

The faithful Arawas have been in a great state of excitement for some time, they think or pretend, to think that they are going to be attacked by their enemies, the Ngatiporous etc etc, and have been for the last week strengthening their Pahs here, the large Pah they have made almost inaccessible, I think it is all done to try to get more arms etc from the Government – we hear that "Hori Tupaea" has returned to Tauranga is he still under your surveillance, or is he allowed to go where he likes, I know Mr Smith thinks that if he used his influence with his tribe, that it would tend greatly to pacify this part of the country, so I hope some arrangement has been made with him to do so Mr Smith told us a short time since, that he had written to Mrs S. to say that he thought she might now safely come down and live here so I suppose she will arrive shortly...

The killing of the Rev. Carl Volkner by the Hauhau fanatics at Opotiki early in March 1865 and the resulting tension in the Bay of Plenty, however, put a stop to the Smith family's plans for the time being. By 9 May 1865, when Mrs Kirby wrote again to Mrs Brown, all was calm, at Maketu anyway:

Everything is quiet at this place, we hear from Mr Smith, that the hostile natives who were at Canaan have left that place, and that Zachariah (?Hakaraia) is in such a state of alarm for fear of being captured that he never sleeps twice in the same place... the ministers seem determined to send all the Troops out of the country so I hope we shall soon be going home.

Both my husband and I are very tired of Maketu... the weather we have at present is very treacherous, it is so cold in the mornings and evenings, and generally hot during the day. We have been greatly disappointed here at not receiving the English mail, and I fear there is little chance of it arriving for some time longer...

On 29 May Mrs Kirby gave Mrs Brown a detailed account of the recent fire that destroyed a large number of whares in Fort Colville (as Pukemaire Redoubt was called in those days, after Major Kirby's predecessor Major F.M. Colville). From this, and her remarks concerning Mr Grubb, it is assumed that the Kirbys' whare was outside the fort:

I am happy to say that we have not lost anything by the fire, I was greatly alarmed when first it broke out, and saw it spreading so very rapidly, as I feared that the Ammunition (of which there was a great quantity in the Fort) might explode when of course the consequences would have been frightful, but, Major Kirby got it the first thing... the Commissariat store was saved by pulling down a large Whare which was near it, all the Officers Whares, and also the Artillery and Militia mens were destroyed. Dr O'Connell has lost everything he possessed here, Capt. Oakley and the other Officers have lost many things.

The fire broke out at about ½ past five o'clock P.M. in Dr O'Connell's Whare, where he was sitting at the time, I suppose the fire must have caught some part of the Raupo near the Chimney You have no idea of the very rapid manner in which the fire spread from one Whare to the other, they lighted up like a piece of Paper it is perfectly impossible to put one out, when once it catches fire, the only Officers Whare which was not burnt was one of Major Kirby's which he built in the Fort before I came here & which was quite empty, it escaped as the wind was not blowing in that direction at the time, three of the 68<sup>th</sup> Officers are sleeping in it since the night of the Fire...

I was very sorry I could not ask Mr Grubb to dinner on Saturday, as I fear he must have dined most uncomfortably in the Fort, but I have not been very well for the last day or two, & besides our Whare is so very small and we have been obliged to part with our servant & have now only got a man who knows nothing about waiting at Table & cooks very badly, so I do not like under all these circumstances asking strangers to dinner



***Mrs Sophia Smith, nee Baker, wife of T.H. Smith, Civil Commissioner for the Bay of Plenty, 1864-65.***

**Photo: The Elms Foundation.**

Early in 1865 Mrs Kirby had written to Mrs Brown remarking that she wished Tauranga were within walking distance of Maketu so that she could go and see her sometimes and have a chat. But in answer to an invitation from Mrs Brown to spend a few days in Tauranga, Mrs Kirby replied that it was so unpleasant for a lady to go by herself from Maketu to Tauranga that she did not think she would leave the place until her husband was ordered away. On 7 October 1865 Mrs Kirby replied in similar vein to another invitation from Mrs Brown:



...unfortunately my Husband cannot get leave, and I could not well go without him as it is so difficult for a lady to travel from here to Tauranga without a gentleman, going by sea is very uncertain & unpleasant, besides, we are both in very low spirits at present, as I regret to say, we heard last mail of the death of our dear Mother Mrs Kirby... I loved her very much, she was always most kind & affectionate to me... I could not get anything here in the way of mourning, so have been obliged to write to Clarke in Auckland...

This place looks quite deserted now all the Arawas having gone to fight at Matata, Mr Smith told my husband the other day that they had got between Whakatane and Matata & captured three men and some women, we heard today that the three men had been taken down in the 'Mavis' to Opotiki to be handed over to Major Brassey, one of them being accused of being one of the murderers of Mr Fulloon...

We have made a small garden this year, which is a great amusement to us, but as yet our Salads & Cabbages are making slow progress, probably on account of the poorness of the soil, Peas and Beans appear to grow the best, but we could only get a small quantity of the former seed here.

In a letter written on 8 January 1866 Mrs Kirby mentioned that the 68<sup>th</sup> (Major Kirby's regiment) was expected to sail from Auckland for England in the following month. The Kirbys however hoped to remain in Maketu until shortly before the regiment left Tauranga for Auckland. Because they would need to spend a few days in Tauranga, Mrs Kirby asked Mrs Brown if they could live in one of the cottages on the mission property, as there was no inn at Tauranga. Of life at Maketu Mrs Kirby wrote:

We have very hot weather here for the last month, and are generally not able to go out for our ride or walk before five o'clock P.M. Two photographers came here the other day, and although my husband had not such confidence in their skill, he got his Carte de Visite taken...

We made ourselves more comfortable here lately as we added another room to our Whare and have had lots of nice Vegetables out of our garden, so that I have become quite reconciled to Maketu, and am not so anxious to leave it as I was some time ago...

A week later, in her last letter to Christina Brown from Maketu, Emily Kirby informed her friend that Major Kirby had not been well lately. Having had a "slight attack of Liver", he was obliged to "put on a Blister". Mrs Kirby was sorry that Mr Kinder had not been able to "spend a day with us" on a recent visit he had made to Maketu. She hoped, however, to see Mrs Kinder (nee Celia Brown) in Auckland when she and her husband went there.

Mrs Kirby's next letter to Mrs Brown was written from "Claremont House", Auckland, on 28 February:

We had a most unpleasant voyage from Tauranga here, the Vessel was awfully crowded and dirty, there was no accommodation for Ladies on board, but Mrs Harington was fortunate enough to get the Captains Cabin on deck, it was rather rough during the night and I was very sick for some hours...

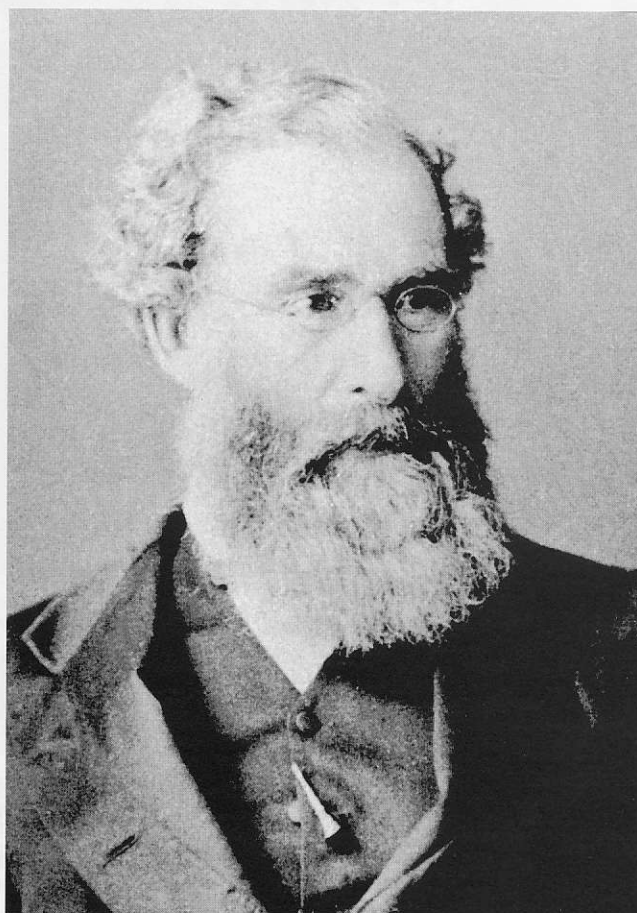
The Kirbys were back in England by the end of June and were afterwards stationed successively at Portsmouth, Aldershot, Manchester, Cork (Ireland) and India, where Brigadier (as he then was) Kirby died in 1877. In the years after they left New Zealand, husband and wife never forgot Tauranga and Maketu and often asked about progress there.

Major Kirby, indeed, had been interested enough in New Zealand while at Maketu to gather the material for a novel set in this country. Entitled *Henry Ancrum*, it was published in two volumes in 1872.

#### POSTSCRIPT

A man who served under Major Kirby at Maketu as a member of the 1<sup>st</sup> Waikato Regiment was Angus Smith, later Captain Angus Smith NZC. He published his "Recollections of the War" in the *Bay of Plenty Times* Opotiki supplement in a series of articles in the spring of 1890. On 11 September he recorded his impressions of Kirby, viewing him in a different way to Emily Kirby, and of a life at Maketu:

Major Kirby of the 68<sup>th</sup>, an old Indian Officer who had been for a long time on detached service in India, among the hill tribes, commanded the station at Maketu. He was very unpopular with the men being a terrible martinet, finding fault on the most trivial pretexts both on parade and about the camp... He had his young wife with him at Maketu and when taking his afternoon stroll with her he was furious if anyone came anywhere near them. The months spent at Maketu were of a most monotonous character. Garrison duty, with fatigues and drill as variations, constituted our sole occupation.



**T.H. Smith, Civil Commissioner for the Bay of Plenty in 1864-65.**  
Photo: The Elms Foundation.