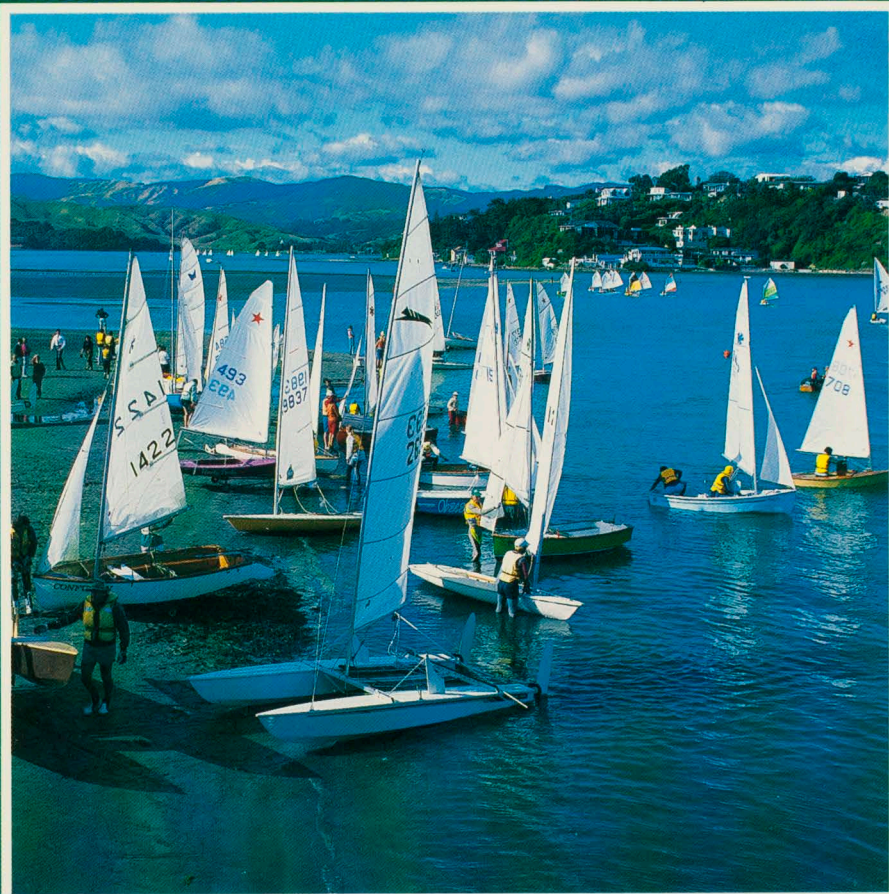


PORIRUA MUSEUM HISTORY SERIES

No 6

THE BOUNTIFUL HARBOUR





The area we know today as the Porirua and Pauatahanui Harbours has undergone many geological changes. The two harbours were formed five thousand years ago when the sea rose and drowned two major river valleys.

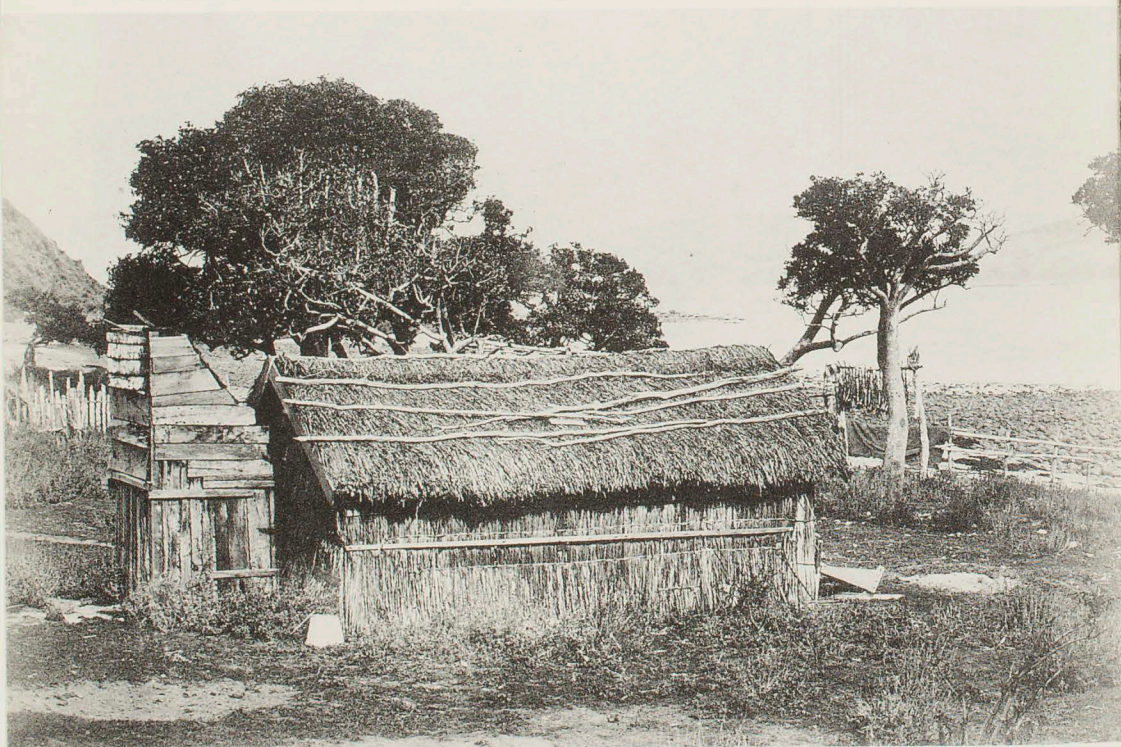


Aerial view looking north along the Porirua arm into the Pauatahanui arm of the harbour.  
*Geoff Marshall.*



## TANIWHA

In Maori tradition the Porirua Harbour is home to the taniwha, Te Awarua o Porirua. Many years ago, long before any human footprints appeared on the mudflats, Awarua decided that he would like to fly as his friends the birds did. In order to save himself from ridicule, Awarua practised his flying at night. Beginning at one end of the harbour he would race along until he reached the other end. After much practising Awarua felt his body lifting off the water. Delighted by his success, he called together all the birds to watch him fly. As he sped along the water he was cheered by the birds. He got so carried away with his flight he forgot about the hill at the north end of the harbour, and he crashed into it in an ungainly heap. Undaunted, he tried again, this time facing the open sea. His great body rose into the air but not high enough. Again he crashed, and the impact removed the top of Mana Island. Soon after this embarrassing accident he fulfilled his ambition and gained flight without further mishap.



Maori settlement on the edge of the Harbour c 1880. *Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.*



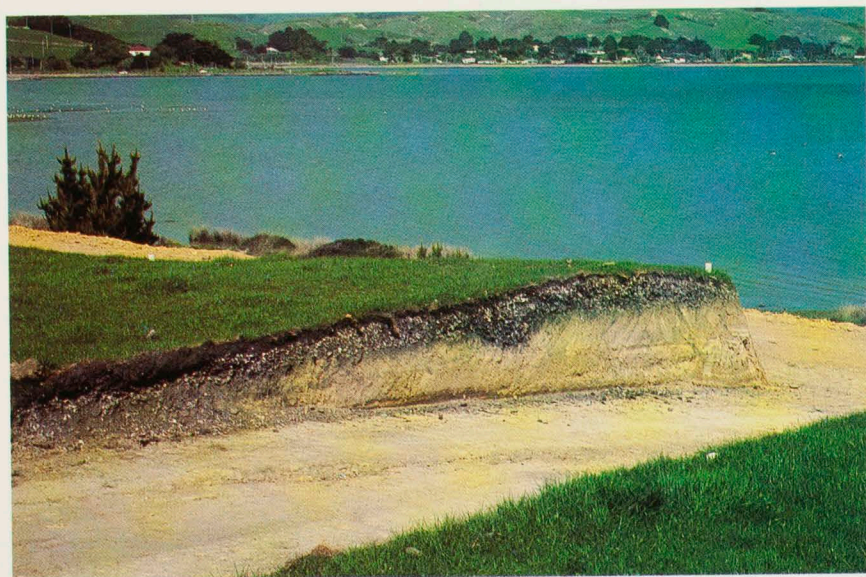
Ngati Toa elder, Te Karehana Whakataki, standing beside the anchor stone of Kupe's canoe, Matahourua. *Porirua Museum.*

## KUPE

The great Polynesian explorer, Kupe, is credited with being the first human to see the Porirua Harbour, naming it "Parirua" meaning the two flowings of the tide. Other reminders of his visit to this region can be found in the full name of Mana Island, Te Mana o Kupe ki Aotearoa, and in his landing place, which he named Komangarautawhiri (Komanga Point), situated south of Titahi Bay. The anchor stone from Kupe's canoe, Matahourua, rested for many years on what is now Ngati Toa Domain. Damaged in the 1840s by soldiers stationed at the nearby Paremata Barracks, it is now in the Museum of New Zealand.



The combined area of the Porirua and Pauatahanui harbours presently measures some 15 square kilometres. About 30 species of fish can be found in these harbours. Many are migratory, entering and leaving according to the season. Others arrive and depart on the daily tides. As the two harbours offer very different environments each is inhabited by some species not found in the other. For example, the common sole is plentiful in the Pauatahanui arm but absent in the Porirua one. Conversely, red cod are often caught by set net in the Porirua arm but seldom in Pauatahanui.

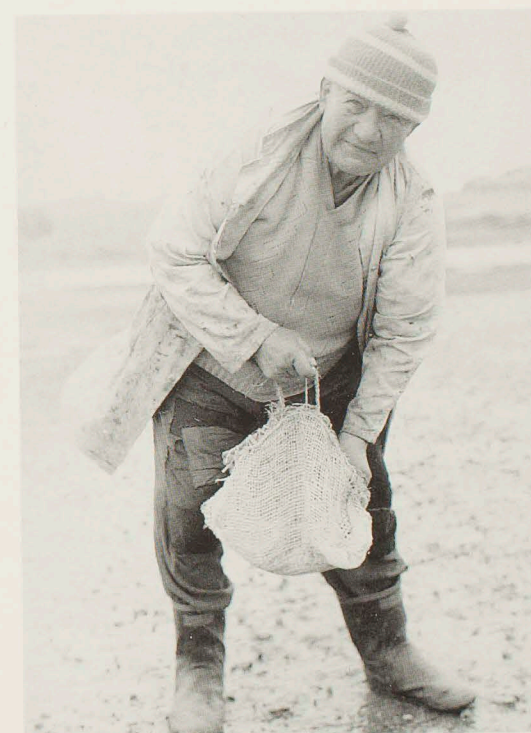


A midden or prehistoric rubbish dump exposed on the edge of Pauatahanui Harbour, 1987. *Kelvin Day*.

The first humans to settle on the shores of the harbours many hundreds of years ago would have found them to be an enormous food larder. In addition to the fish, shellfish were to be found around the shores. The bush, which reached the water's edge, was inhabited by many species of birds, and in prehistoric times moa roamed the Paremata lowlands. Midden or prehistoric rubbish dumps, which are sometimes found around the harbours' shores, reveal what types of shellfish and other food were exploited by the early Maori.

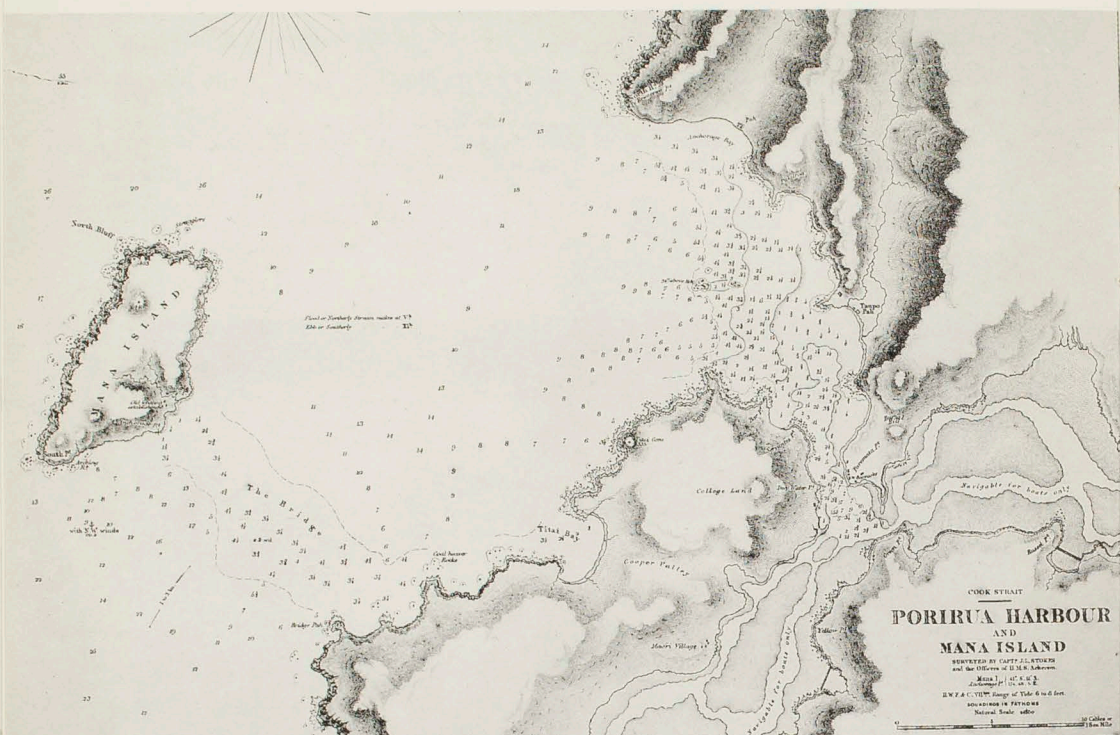
For many years the Porirua region was occupied by people belonging to the Ngati Ira tribe. They were displaced by the Ngati Toa. Battle scarred and faced with possible annihilation, Ngati Toa migrated to Porirua from their ancestral home on the shores of the Kawhia Harbour in the mid 1820s.

Porirua offered Ngati Toa secure food supplies and access to the European ships which occasionally sailed through Cook Strait. From these vessels Ngati Toa were able to gain muskets to help in conquering further territory in the South Island.



Ngati Toa kaumatua, the late Akuhata Wineera, gathering shellfish on the mudflats of Porirua Harbour, 1988. *Neil Penman*.



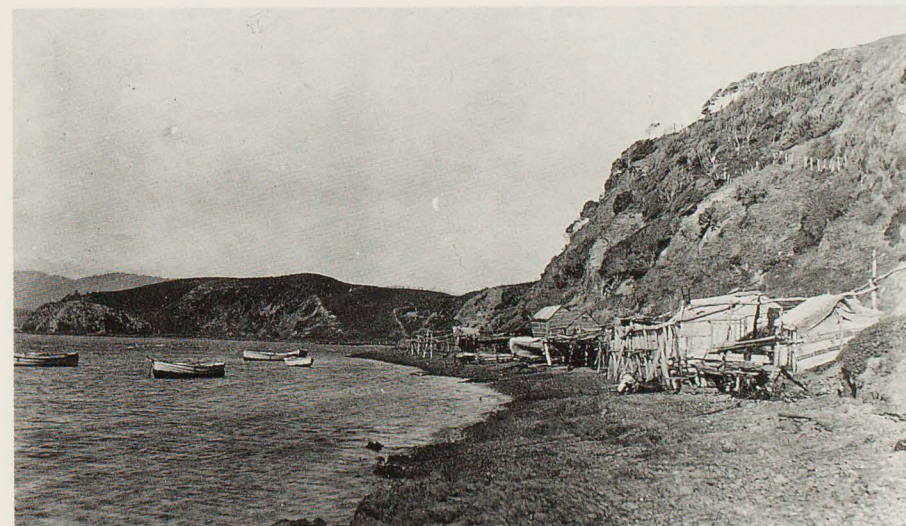


The first detailed chart of the Porirua Harbour by Captain J.L. Stokes, 1850. *Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.*

## SHORE WHALING

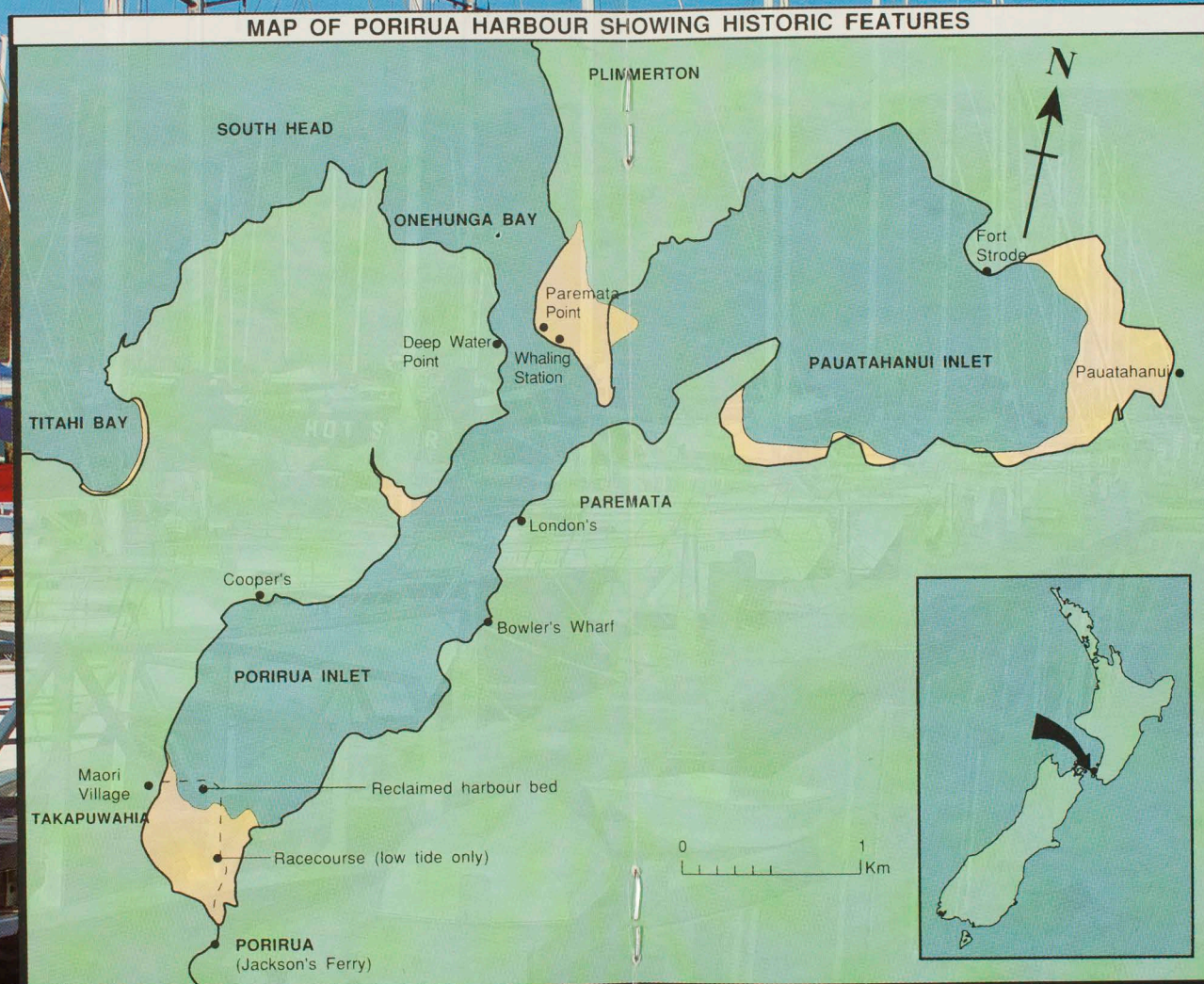
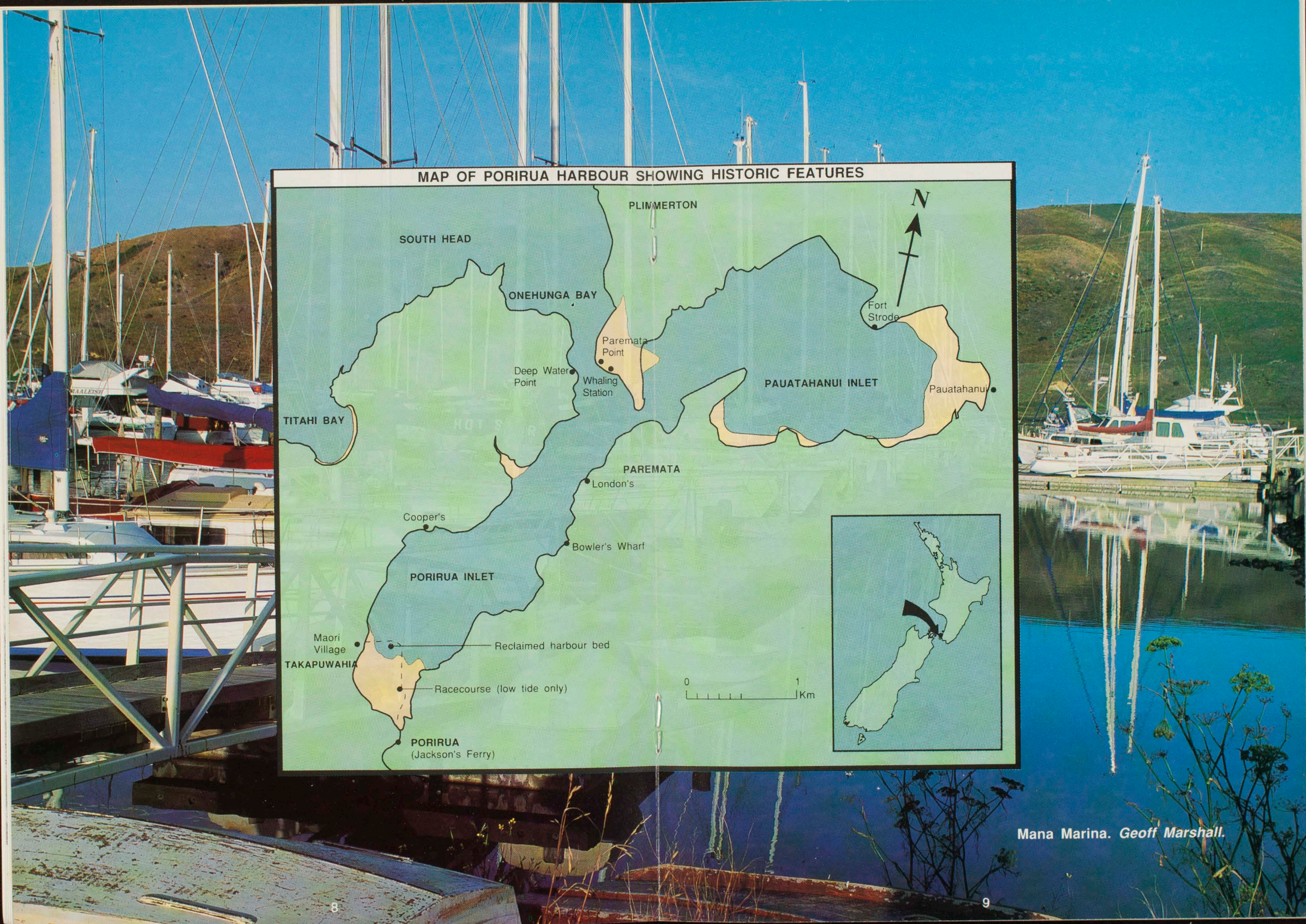
In 1835 a shore whaling station was established at Paremata Point by Joseph Toms. For a brief period whaling was an important industry in Porirua, employing local Maori as well as European whalers. In conjunction with his whaling activities, Toms opened a small inn and accommodation house at Paremata in 1842. It was here that he dispensed his famous "Porirua chain-lightning" brew.

In the early 1840s a number of European travellers recorded their first glimpses and impressions of Porirua Harbour. Edward Jerminingham Wakefield, who walked from Wellington in March 1840, described the harbour as being surrounded by 'wooded hillocks of moderate height', which 'gave it the appearance of a small inland lake'. A few months later A.D.W. Best made what he described as 'a nasty five mile walk ... over sand rocks and shingle' around the harbour. Concerned with the usefulness of the harbour to European settlers, he noted it was a 'fine bay, the anchorage secure and twelve feet water on the bar'. Charles Heaphy, surveyor for the New Zealand Company, wrote in 1840, 'Had the depth of water been greater at the entrance of the harbour, Porirua might have been chosen for the site of the first enterprise of the New Zealand Company in preference to Port Nicholson' [Wellington].



Fishing baches along the southern side of Pauatahanui Harbour, with Golden Gate in the background. The clubhouse of the Paremata Boating Club occupies the site today. *Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.*





Mana Marina. Geoff Marshall.

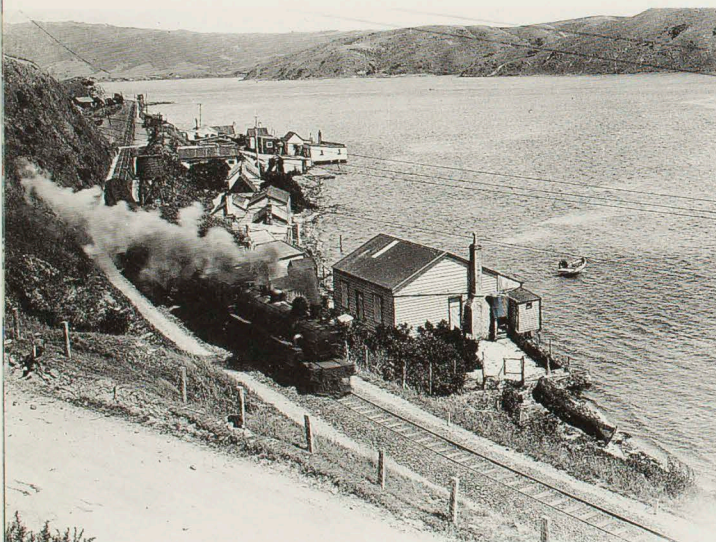


## HOBSON STREET

By the 1880s a small fishing settlement existed just south of the entrance to the Pauatahanui arm. It became known as Hobson Street after a group of youths removed the street sign from Wellington and transferred it to the settlement.

The little settlement was made up of fishermen of a number of nationalities including Greeks, Italians, Austrians and Scots. Such a diversity of people made for a very lively community. Many of them combined their musical talents and formed a small orchestra which would regularly play at Saturday night dances.

Weather permitting, the boats would go out daily to fish the waters of the Cook Strait. Huge catches of fish would arrive back at Paremata. Once landed, the fish were taken into Wellington to be sold. Unsold fish were smoked at Bruce's smoke house. Occasionally the catches were so large that the excess fish were loaded into a railway wagon that was then pushed back onto the Paremata railway bridge and the fish shovelled into the outgoing tide.



The fishing settlement of "Hobson Street". Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

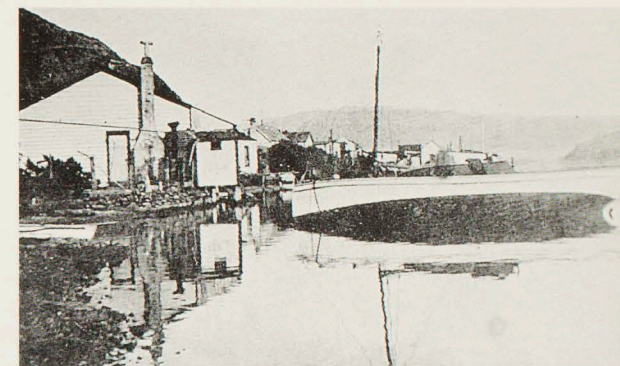
Last Sunday night some Italian fishermen from Island Bay boarded some of the Paremata boats and threw £80 worth of fishing gear overboard because the Paremata fishermen have just left the Fishermen's Union. The Italians have also threatened to burn the "Southern Cross", the biggest of the Paremata boats, if she returns to Island Bay.

The Hobson Street fisherman were occasionally involved in disputes with the fisherman from Island Bay. A Paremata resident recorded an incident which occurred in June 1933:

## SHIPBUILDING

The first ship building yard to be established in the area was situated on the Porirua arm in 1832. It was owned by William Cooper. Joseph Toms had shipbuilding facilities at his station at Paremata. Several years later James Walker, a Scottish shipwright, set up a shipbuilding yard there and built several fine vessels. In the 1940s Alf Saunders established a boatbuilding business in Hobson Street. Many of Paremata's fishing boats were built at this yard.

Entering the Porirua Harbour by boat can be dangerous. Many vessels have nearly come to grief, but surprisingly few have actually been wrecked. The earliest known wrecking of a European ship in the Porirua Harbour was the schooner *Three Brothers*. Built in 1842 by Joseph Toms, it was sold in 1845 to three Porirua Maori, David Puaha, Solomon Matakapi and Joseph Henia. It was wrecked at the harbour entrance on 16 January 1847, but there was no loss of life.



Thought to be the Brown brothers' boat *Matakitaki*, moored alongside a house on Hobson Street. Porirua Museum.

Seven lives were lost in November 1852 when the row boat from *H.M.S. Fantame* overturned as it was entering the harbour. Another row boat coming to enquire about the first also capsized with a loss of a further two lives. On 23 August 1928 brothers Alex and Henry Brown were drowned. They had ignored warnings by fellow fishermen not to go and retrieve their nets in the stormy weather. Their boat, the *Matakitaki*, capsized as they were coming back into the harbour.

A fishing trawler, *Mary Ellen*, was another vessel which fell victim to the Porirua Harbour. While returning from fishing off Kapiti Island, the trawler sprang a leak as it entered the harbour. It finally sank on the reef, and the three crewmen were rescued. The following morning, 8 May 1944, only the mast could be seen above the water.



## TRANSPORT

In the mid 1840s a ferry service was established on the Porirua harbour. The following was the scale of charges from Paremata Point:-

	Shilling	Pence
For crossing to Deep Water Point, each person	0	3
For crossing to Deep Water Point, each horse	1	0
For crossing to Deep Water Point, each pig	0	3
To or from Jacksons, each person	1	6
To or from Cooper's	0	9
To or from Fort Strode	0	9
To or from Pauatahanui	1	6

Several traders operated out of the Porirua Harbour during the early 1840s. Bowler had a store and small wharf at Papakowhai. Another trader, Jack London, was based near Paremata at a place called "Tinipia", a transliteration of gingerbeer.

## EARTHQUAKE

Beginning in the late 1850s European settlement in the area has had a major impact on the harbours. Until recently it was thought that the floor of the

Pauatahanui arm had been reduced by the 1855 West Wairarapa earthquake. However, research by a geologist has shown that while uplifting has taken place in the past neither the 1848 or 1855 earthquakes lifted the harbour floor. A more plausible explanation for the changes to the shoreline at the head of the Pauatahanui Inlet is the accumulation of silt following the rapid clearance of the surrounding bush which began in the late 1850s. The removal of this protective cover allowed erosion to occur, and many thousands of tonnes of soil were deposited into the harbour.



The result of a fishing trip in Cook Strait c 1920. *Porirua Museum.*

## RECLAMATION

As the area surrounding the Porirua and Pauatahanui arms was developed, pressure began to increase for areas of the harbour bed to be filled in. In spite of opposition during the 1940s, the Public Works Department began a programme of land reclamation at the southern end of the Porirua arm. The prized Ngati Toa seafood bed, Parumoana, was destroyed and with it a source of food of renowned delicacy among Maoridom. Ngati Toa put forward a claim to the Government for compensation. However, the meetings, submissions, and a petition failed, and their grievance was dismissed by the Government of the day.

With the development of the Porirua city centre in the 1960s more reclamation was undertaken. Again submissions were made by Ngati Toa to the Government but reclamation proceeded. Much of Porirua's light industry now occupies reclaimed harbour bed.



An aerial photograph looking north up the Porirua arm showing reclamation of the southern end underway, 1954. *Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.*



## RECREATION

The two arms of the harbour provide a multitude of recreational possibilities. A regular recreational pursuit in Porirua from the 1860s until the 1900s was horse racing. The racecourse was on the beach at the southern end, so races could only be held at low tide. Porirua became a nationally renowned centre for racing, largely due to the efforts of Joshua Prosser.

Yachting has long been a favourite pastime. The Paremata Boating Club was formed in 1923 and the Plimmerton Club in 1925. Since that time there have been regular regattas, with the Easter regatta, hosted by the Paremata Club, being the most well-known.



Regatta day, Paremata c 1930.  
*Porirua Museum.*

Windsurfing is another popular activity. For the less experienced the Pauatahanui arm provides sheltered waters while the more adventurous can test their skills between Plimmerton beach and Onehunga Bay.

The Porirua arm, at high tide, provides an ideal venue for powerboat racing. At other times rowing clubs use it, either for racing or training.

The Porirua arm also acts as a run-way. A floatplane, which regularly flies between Picton and Porirua, has facilities to dock at either end (Onepoto or Whitireia Polytechnic) of the harbour





Photographs: Geoff Marshall



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