

Meinertzhagen collection of 1895

Frederick Huth Meinertzhagen was born in 1845 into a prosperous and well connected banking family. His German father, Daniel, came to London in 1826 from Bremen, to seek his fortune and joined the banking house of Frederick Huth, eventually marrying his daughter Amelia. After private schooling Fritz, as he was known among his family and friends, emigrated to New Zealand in 1866, where he took a lease on land in Waimarama, Hawke's Bay, in partnership with his school friend, Walter Lorne Campbell, and married Ellen Moore, daughter of a Christchurch doctor. Campbell died suddenly in 1874 and was succeeded as Fritz's partner by Fritz's brother-in-law, Thomas Richard Moore. In 1881 Fritz took his entire family to England - his wife, five daughters and an adopted Maori son, Tame Turoa Te Rangihauturu. But on arrival at Liverpool a disaster struck - his wife, two of his daughters and the Maori son died of scarlet fever. Fritz never recovered from this tragedy and it is not clear whether he ever returned to New Zealand, where eventually his daughter Gertrude continued to farm. Meinertzhagen died at Tunbridge Wells in 1895 and the same year his collection, the largest single Maori collection at the Museum consisting of over 600 items and including other Pacific material, was sold by Gertrude to the British Museum.

These scant facts about Meinertzhagen's life are given in Richard Meinertzhagen's *Diary of a Black Sheep* (London, 1964) and Sydney Grant's *Waimarama* (Palmertson North, 1977), both of which mention Fritz's collecting only very briefly although Grant gives a detailed history of his farming activities in Waimarama and later those of Gertrude. It is Walter Lorne Campbell's unpublished Journals (volumes 1-3 and 6-12, covering the period 1.1.1862 - 31.1.1863 and 1.3.1866 - 10.7.1874, with vols 4 and 5 missing) which flesh out this elusive figure and throw some light on Fritz's collecting passion (his collection came to the Museum without any accompanying documentation). Apart from Campbell's Journal the only other documentation about Meinertzhagen that could be traced consists of his incomplete laconic diaries for 1867 and 1874 in the Canterbury Museum, Christchurch (ARC 1988.4) and a few letters to von Haast, dated in 1875 -79, in the Turnbull Library in Wellington (MSP-37, fold.119).

Meinertzhagen and Campbell were friends since their early days in a private school in Surrey in which they spent five years, leaving in December 1862. It is obvious from Campbell's Journal that it was a close friendship, the families knew each other, the boys visited each other's houses and spent a lot of time together, wrote letters when they were in their respective family homes, Fritz in London, Walter in Carmyle near Glasgow, and it was already during those school years that Fritz's collecting began, although at that stage it was mainly natural history specimens. Walter writes about a lunch with Fritz's mother and sister 'and then Fritz showed me his curiosities' (Campbell: 15.3.1862), and two days later they go 'to town to buy sand and a bath for Fritz's birds' (Campbell: 17.3.1862). In the same year there are several mentions of their collecting expeditions, for example: 'Went to Richmond with Fritz in the afternoon, and to Tangle Park in the evening, where we got some moths, 2 of which are rather rare; I had the pleasure of

seeing them first, which is rather difficult as Fritz has eyes like a weasel.’ (Campbell: 10.5.1862).

What prompted the two young men to try their luck in New Zealand remains a mystery because the part of Walter’s Journal which probably could provide the answer is missing but in March 1866 their plans are well under way: ‘Got a letter from Fritz saying that his Father consents to the New Zealand plan.’; ‘Got a letter from Fritz saying that both his parents consent to our plan. Wrote to him. Our plan looks very real now – I think it will be charming if it succeeds.’ (Campbell: 12.3.1866; 13.3.1866). After preparations, shopping in London and family farewells, they left aboard *Sir Ralph Abercrombie* from Gravesend on 31 May and landed in Lyttleton on 5 September. They spent the next two years getting to know the country and sheep-breeding business, staying with friends and travelling, sometimes together, sometime separately, and prospecting for land, during which time Fritz did not neglect his collecting. ‘Fritz found a lot of veritable Moa bones amongst the limestone – not fossil, but real bones.’ (Campbell: 1.10.1866); ‘Fritz has got a good lot of moths & butterflies while in Nelson, also a greenstone hatchet.’ (Campbell: 15.1.1867). And Fritz himself: ‘Found a piece of greenstone this morning, just begun to be worked for an axe.’ (Canterbury Museum ARC 1988.4:13.4.1867). After getting to Rangiora he ‘instantly commenced bargaining with the proprietor of the Accom. Ho. for two Fijian clubs he had. He wanted £2.10 for them but I beat him down to 30 shillings very soon.’ (Canterbury Museum ARC 1988.4: 14.4.1867). In Christchurch: ‘I walked about this evening with little Dapper (who gave me a Maori cartridge box [perhaps no. **840**, cartridge box 1895-415, although the date of 1869 given on the label pasted on the box seems to contradict it]...’ (Canterbury Museum ARC 1988.4: 20.4.1867). At Lake Forsyth he came across an abandoned pa: ‘There were lots of nets made out of flax, which I felt very inclined to pocket, but didn’t, I am happy to say. I found some spears also, made out of some very hard wood but they were too large to carry away.’ (Canterbury Museum ARC 1988.4: 17.5.1867).

Finally in 1868 Meinertzhagen and Campbell took possession of Waimarama: ‘...having landed in Napier on the 27th July 1868 – I am now a full blown squatter & am going to take possession of the Waiamara station – The firm is to be Messrs Campbell & Meinertzhagen. Fritz had got married in the meantime...’ (Campbell: note after 8.5.1867; there is a gap in the Journal between 8.5.1867 and 30.7.1868), and Fritz and his wife arrived in Waimarama in October. While getting things organized on their station, Fritz did not neglect collecting: ‘Fritz, his wife & I walked up to Monaghan’s ... On our way back we looked for curiosities at a place where there had been a great massacre & cannibal feast. I picked up rather a good jaw-bone & Fritz found an ear-ring of black jade [probably no. **365**, nephrite pendant 1895-656].’; ‘Fritz & his wife went out for a walk, Fritz got some specimens of obsidian & shot a brace of grey ducks.’ (Campbell: 31.1.1869; 11.2.1869). Fritz and Walter ran the station together but one gets the impression from Walter’s Journal that it was he who carried the heavier burden (Fritz was not infrequently away) although there is not a trace of resentment on his part and their relationship has never been under a cloud. Fritz continued his collecting and took interest in the local Maori, and they were both learning the language: ‘Fritz & I worked at Maori grammar for a bit in the evening & then overhauled Station Accounts.’ (Campbell: 9.8.1869); ‘Fritz has taken to skinning birds & does them very well. ... Arapiu came over

to see Fritz about some Maori Axes that he has been making handles for.’ [probably nos **1255** to **1260**, hafted adzes 1895-438 and 1895-864 to 868] (Campbell: 3.10.1869); ‘Fritz unpacked his celebrated box of Auckland curiosities. His Mere “poenamoo” is lovely.’ [probably collected when Fritz took his wife for confinement in Auckland in July where their daughter Gertrude was born but the present Meinertzhagen collection at the Museum does not include any nephrite club]. (Campbell: 13.10.1869). They also got themselves tattooed: ‘Both my tattoo & Fritz’s are healing rapidly, I have had our crest & arms done on my chest ... Fritz has had a Maori device put on his shoulder – The Natives did it, & very well, too.’ (Campbell: 1.7.1870).

In July 1870 Fritz, with his wife and young daughter Gertrude, left for England, to raise fund for their farming venture, where they stayed until the late 1871. Fritz’s mission was accomplished successfully but their return delayed by the arrival of another daughter. While in London, Meinertzhagen came to the British Museum, met Franks, looked at the Museum’s Maori collections and made some general comments about various types of objects which are recorded in Franks’s notebooks under the name ‘Mr Meinenhausen’ [sic] under the dates 7.12.1870 and 9.12.1870 (BM AOA Archives: Franks Ethnographic Notebook SS2). He also visited the Christy collection at Victoria Street on 9.12.1870 and 9.1.1871 (BM AOA Archives: Visitors Christy Collection 1866 – Sept. 1880) and on 31.12.1870 presented to the Museum a pair of sandals, samples of flax and kauri gum and a collection of obsidian flakes (nos **XXXXXXXXXX**, 1895-7012, 7013, 7014 and 7015, where his initials are recorded in the Register incorrectly as ‘J.H.’). At the same time he must have shown Franks and others some of his own ‘curiosities’ for Campbell writes after Fritz’s return: ‘Showed Fritz all the changes & improvements that have taken place since he left. Went down to the beach & he at once began to pick up chips of obsidian. He says his collection of stone adzes was very much prized at home – All the big wigs were in raptures about that big Okai Hau axe [perhaps no. **XXX**, Hawke’s Bay type adze blade 1895-832].’ (Campbell: 24.2.1872).

After Fritz’s return in January 1872, it was Walter’s turn to take a break at home. He left in May and returned in February 1874. Walter also picked up the collecting bug because there are several mentions of it in the Journal and he brought home some things with him: ‘We unpacked all my curiosities which were very much admired by all the dear people...’ (Campbell: 12.9.1872). He also gave some to museums: ‘I went to Edinburgh by 10.35 train ... Went to the Antiquarian Museum & saw my Maori axe in a very good position among the stone weapons.’ (Campbell: 27.6.1873). ‘Went to Edinburgh by 10.35 train. Took my carved Maori image to the Antiquarian Museum. Mr Anderson, the Curator, was very much pleased with it.’ (Campbell: 11.7.1873) [this image is illustrated on the cover of Dale Idiens’s *Pacific Art*, Edinburgh, Royal Scottish Museum Studies, 1982]. During his stay in Britain he frequently visited the Meinertzhagen family, of whom he writes very warmly in his Journal, and kept in constant touch with Fritz. On his return he writes: ‘Fritz has changed a good deal in the last two years. He looks very healthy & sun-burnt & his beard has grown enormously. It is very jolly seeing him again & makes the return to this miserable place much more bearable.’ (Campbell: 17.2.1874). At Waimarama there was a new house finished and Fritz’s family increased by a third daughter.

In 1874 Fritz went away again (and this period, from 27.3.1874 till 27.5.1874 is recorded in his own Diary), first sightseeing around Taupo and Rotorua and never forgetting his collecting: 'Mooned about Ohinemutu & bought Maori curiosities.' (Canterbury Museum ARC 1988.4: 5.4.1874), then embarking on a trip to Fiji – where he also collected whenever there was an opportunity. At Navuso on the river Rewa on Viti Levu 'Stayed at a house 80 feet long 50 feet wide and about 50 feet high.'; following day 'The other gentlemen all started this morning to go further up the river, but I, seeing signs of very good implements etc. about the place, thought I would stay on & see what I could get ... I have been well repaid & have got more than ever I expected & than our boat will carry, I am afraid.' (Canterbury Museum ARC 1988.4: 4.5.1874, 5.5.1874). On his return to Waimarama Walter writes: 'Fritz looking very well – he says he has enjoyed his trip immensely. He and Agnew Brown were about 5 weeks at Fiji & saw a good deal of the Islands.' (Campbell: 29.5.1874). Life in Waimarama continued as usual, and the last entry in Campbell's Journal is on 10.7.1874 where he writes about fishing with Fritz, letters from home and the work going on on the station; seven days later, on 17.7, Walter died suddenly while working on floating rafts of timber down the Tukituki River. His death was recorded as due to natural causes and he was buried in the Napier cemetery (Grant 1977: 46).

Without Campbell's diaries, the information about Meinertzhagen's later life largely dries up. Soon after Walter's death Meinertzhagen took on a new partner in Waimarama, his brother-in-law Thomas Richard Moore, who eventually became the de facto manager of the farm, Meinertzhagen gradually less active in its affairs (Grant 1977: 47). It is very likely that he concentrated more on his intellectual pursuits and collecting. He was a member of the Hawke's Bay Philosophical Society, the Hawke's Bay Agricultural and Pastoral Association and the Acclimatization Society (Grant 1977: 102) and in 1879 had a paper published in the *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute*, 'Notes and Description of a possibly new Species of *Aplysia*'. He corresponded with Sir Julius von Haast, Director of the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch, with whom he exchanged specimens (BM AOA Eth.Doc.836, R. Fyfe letter 7.5.1996) and to whom he reported on his searches: 'I found nothing with the skeletons with one exception. With that one I found a large *Mesodesma* shell which had evidently been used to held red ochre – the color still remaining in the shell [probably the shell for mixing ochre 1895-751] & fragments of the conventional "Tiki", carved on a piece of whalebone.' (Turnbull Library MSP-47, fold.119: 19.5.1876). In his searches he was accompanied by his wife: 'I think I can get you one more perfect human skeleton but, as my wife is the discoverer, I will not guarantee it till I see myself, though almost all the others were also discovered by her.' (Turnbull Library MSP-37, fold.119: 19.5.1876). He also knew Augustus Hamilton; Hamilton mentions him in his Diaries and in 1886 he visited Waimarama – Meinertzhagen was not there, but Moore told him that Meinertzhagen had given permission for Hamilton to take whatever he wanted from his room – mainly natural history specimens are mentioned (BM AOA Eth.Doc.836, E. Pishief letter 21.10.1997). Edge-Partington, while on his travels, wrote to Read from Auckland in 1897, two years after the Museum bought Meinertzhagen's collection: 'I am... in the thick of it here & have come across Mr Hamilton who knew Meinertzhagen well & has sketches of most of his things so we shall be able to get I think right descriptions for all specimens. The two fish hooks with the moa bone backs [probably composite trolling hooks, variant *pa*

kahawai form, 1895-408 and 1895-409] are genuine & there is only one other pair known & those in the coll[ection] of Mr Colenso of Napier.’ (BM PE Correspondence. J. Edge-Partington 5.7.1897). According to Skinner, at some stage Meinertzhagen visited the Chatham Islands (Skinner 1974: 24) and there are indeed some Chatham Islands objects in his collection.

Meinerzhagen’s relationship with his Maori workers and neighbours was good. There were occasional frustrations and quarrels but these were quickly patched up. He took interest in the people, visited them when they were sick and Campbell writes when in Scotland: ‘Got New Zealand letters on 28th Nov. – two from Fritz ... Matutaera is very ill & they fear he will die – Fritz has been vaccinating all the Maori children.’ (Campbell: summary after 12.9.1872). That he had the trust of the Maori is perhaps best evinced by the fact that he was allowed to adopt a Maori child and take him to England, and his name was known and respected for Hamilton mentions in his Diaries, while on one of his expeditions to a *pah*, that ‘Meinertzhagen’s name acted like a charm’ (BM AOA Eth.Doc.836, E. Pishief letter 21.10.1997).

The last years of his life were sad. His health, never robust, declined, and his nephew writes: ‘I scarcely remember my uncle. He never recovered from his triple bereavement and my recollection of him is of a thin, gaunt, bearded man with sad eyes.’ (Meinertzhagen 1964: 35) - a poignant contrast to the humorous, enthusiastic, inquisitive and energetic young man who comes alive on the pages of Walter Campbell’s Journal.

When his collection was offered to the British Museum, Read wrote to Gertrude: ‘If the collection comes here, it may be a satisfaction to you to know that every label will be marked “Meinertzhagen Coll.” so that the objects will be always associated with your father.’ (BM PE Correspondence. C.H. Read 10.10.1895). Read kept his word and the collection does have such labels. Franks was very happy with this purchase. He wrote to Hooker (one of the Trustees of the Christy collection): ‘I have recently made a wonderful acquisition for the Christy Collection in the form of a very good series collected by the late Mr Meinertzhagen in New Zealand and filling up a number of our gaps. It was necessary to buy the whole, so the purchase could not conveniently be made by the Museum, as there are many duplicates.’ (BM PE Correspondence. A.W. Franks [unsigned] 8.11.1895). The payment for the collection had to be made quickly as Gertrude Meinertzhagen was going abroad so Franks paid for it himself and was reimbursed later from the Christy fund. The collection was duly registered but some objects, considered ‘duplicates’, were not entered in the Register but were relegated to the Duplicate Collection and were incorporated into the main collection only in the 1980s, identified as Meinertzhagen’s pieces thanks only to those labels promised by Read almost a century earlier.