

Kia ora, gday and welcome to the History of Aotearoa New Zealand. Episode 38: Burn Baby Burn. This podcast is supported by our amazing Patrons, such as Andrew and Lucas. If you want to support HANZ go to [patreon.com/historyaotearoa](https://patreon.com/historyaotearoa). Last time We continued the story of Barnet Burns, a trader who came to Aotearoa and had ended up on quite the adventure. His home was threatened forcing him and his family to flee north to Poverty Bay where he was captured and somewhat forced to undergo the procedure to get moko as a means to survive but once he escaped he got into a couple battles and even a prolonged siege, where was given command of about 150 soldiers. Where we left Team Burns was after his employment by the ship the *Prince of Denmark* or at least the person that owned it, which forced Burns and his family to move again, this time to Tolaga Bay. Today we will round off Burns' story with what he was doing in the bay until he was presented with a fateful choice.

When they got their Burns says there was essentially two villages, one on each side of the river. He says that they were of one iwi but that they were commanded by two brothers, each controlling one side of the awa, river. In this situation there was also one European already trading from one of the kainga so Burns took the other side of the awa, apparently never crossing over for trade. Burns says he stayed here for three years and I presume not a lot really happened during that time as he only mentions a couple of stories during this period, so in general it seemed a whole lot less exciting than his first year in Aotearoa. Especially given one of the first things he mentions is that he sent 107 tons of flax back to Sydney for trade. Over these three years the *Prince* returned to Burns three times and each time it came it always brought news of how shitty things were back in Europe with the growing Industrial Revolution. This only firmed up any desire Burns had to remain in New Zealand, leading him to do everything in his power to get on good terms with the iwi who was now looking after him. Part of this was undergoing the rest of his moko, tattoos, given that if he was to stay here for the rest of his life, it would make sense to blend in and assimilate with the local culture. There were some more selfish reasons though. The first was that since his time as a slave of Ngāi Te Rangi, he had been walking around with only quarter of a moko which would have looked a bit weird, like if your hairdresser just stopped cutting your hair halfway through, so it would be good to get that all balanced out. The other bonus was that if he looked more Māori he would have a natural advantage in diplomacy and trade, partly due to the fact that those he interacted with would be able to tell he was a man of mana and respect but also cause people just tend to like and trust those that look more like them. Burns says he underwent this procedure of his own free will this time and in fact he was happy to do so, seemingly glad to go through this almost right of passage and be considered one of them, "This was the place where I enjoyed happiness – this was the place where I was tatoed... I could travel to any part of the country amongst my friends if I thought proper". Burns adds that this feeling of friendship was mutual among the other chiefs, who he says considered him like a brother. Even to the point where Burns was also considered a rangatira in his own right, commanding a village of 600 people and was able to purchase flax when others couldn't due to his station. It was also likely that Burns had been trained in how to use a taiaha and other Māori weapons, though it seems that he often favoured a musket in battle. It was really at this point that Barnet Burns fully became what would be known as a Pākehā-Māori, those Europeans that lived their lives among Māori and according to tikanga, customs and spiritual practices in the practical world. It seems that Burns had really found his true place, considering these to be the happiest years of his life.

Towards of this period, Burns heard of three Europeans nearby who had escaped from a whaling ship when it had stopped for provisions. To us today this probably isn't that surprising as a sailors life during this time was harsh, no matter what the profession of the vessel but the captain must have thought it had something do with local Māori as he retaliated by capturing 15 people. This naturally angered their whanau, family, and the wider tribe, who at this point had somehow

captured the three escaped whalers and were preparing to kill them for the transgression. Upon hearing this, Burns had the people under his command, along with some from allied chiefs, prepare a waka taua, war canoe, arm themselves and prepare for battle, which they eagerly did. The 60 strong group headed up the coast taking three days to get to their destination at which point they brought the waka to land and covered it in leaves. All of this would indicate that they were probably not expecting a warm reception from the local iwi but Team Burns was welcomed into the pa in what was probably a powhiri, a Māori ceremony of welcome. Although Burns says they were on good terms with the local iwi, citing the powhiri to illustrate this, it is possible this ceremony proceeded despite them being bitter rivals as one of the main purposes of powhiri was to indicate non-hostile intent, among other things. After some kai, food, Burns asked the rangatira chief if he had the three whalers. The chief spoke in whaikorero, a formal speech, using allegory, emphasise and every thing else you would expect, which was not unusual for this kind of event. Essentially what he said was that he did have them and that Burns was not allowed to see them as he intended to keep them as utu recompensation for his own people that had been captured. Burns tried to negotiate with him, telling the rangatira chief that he could not blame the three men, that they were only lowly sailors and that the captain was the one to blame and as such only he should face punishment. The chief was having none of it though and signaled to Burns that he didn't want to discuss the matter further.

Likely frustrated, Burns left the whare house and walked around the pa until dark, probably mulling over what to do. He eventually found a child and asked him whether he knew where the Europeans were being held. Since the child didn't realise that Burns was himself a European, given he had elaborate moko on his face, he pointed towards another house across the pa. Burns ran to it and burst through the door finding the three men nearly naked and very afraid. Asking them questions, Burns found out they had been there for six days and were being told that they were going to be executed every day, probably something Burns sympathised with from his time with Ngāi Te Rangi as a slave. The men begged Burns to save them to which he said he would try to pay a ransom. He went back to the rangatira chief and offered a musket, a barrel of powder and a kakahu cloak for three men as payment. This would have been a pretty nice sum as the musket and powder of immense practical use whereas the cloak also had extra affect of adding mana prestige to the chief depending on its quality. The only caveat to this was that Burns clearly didn't have any of those on him right now so he would need to head back to Team Burns HQ in Tolaga Bay to get them. So Burns needed a promise that the men wouldn't be killed until he returned with the ransom. The chief's reply to this was to basically ask Burns if he was bullshitting but Burns was steadfast, saying that he wasn't and that he was perfectly willing to pay the price for the whalers. The chief went away and consulted with his peers, eventually agreeing but on one condition. Since he didn't know if Burns would return at all once he left he said that he would go with Burns to get the ransom, bringing the three men with him. This would ensure Burns kept his word and if he didn't, he could execute the whalers right then and there. Burns agreed, so they set off.

Most of the journey was uneventful until they got close to the Uawa River. The chief's waka canoe capsised on a sand bar spilling, everything into the water. According to Burns, since they were wrecked, all of their property and even the people themselves were up for grabs due to Māori custom. As such everything was confiscated from the chief, his possessions, his people and most importantly for Burns, the three whalers. Burns says that this would ordinarily lead to war between the parties involved in any other circumstance but since Burns was only really interested in the whalers he used his now superior bargaining position to negotiate with the chief. Well, I say negotiate, he told the chief he could have everything and everyone back if he let Burns keep the three Europeans. Considering this was probably the best deal in the history of trade deals, maybe

ever, the rangatira chief agreed. And I don't just say that to be funny either, cause it was the best deal for both sides. It's obvious why it was good for the rangatira, he got all his people and stuff back and only had to give away three overall meaningless Europeans but for Burns he got to avoid a war that he was very prepared to and expecting to undertake. Why? Cause the musket, barrel of powder and the kakahu cloak he promised to pay didn't actually exist. He didn't have them, he was bullshitting! So points to the rangatira chief for having a good nose for it! With the men free they hung around Tolaga Bay for a bit until a ship came by and took them back to Sydney. What you're probably wondering is why Burns went to all this trouble for three people he didn't know, or at least we aren't sure if he knew them. Was it some sort of kinship and obligation he felt to his fellow Europeans? Or was he just a paragon of virtue and justice? We will likely never know, along with the fates of the 15 Māori that were captured which Burns also doesn't mention.

Burns stayed for a further six months in New Zealand after these events until a ship called the *Bardaster* of Liverpool arrived in October 1834. As would probably often do at the sight of a European vessel, he launched his waka canoe to investigate why it was there and whether it was hostile. When he boarded Burns somewhat surprisingly found an agent of his employer who asked him how much flax he had for him. When Burns told him, the agent said he would need to wait for the next ship to off load it but Burns had other ideas. He told the agent that he wished to go to Sydney over a matter that he wanted to speak about directly to his employer, potentially involving land. The agent said he would need to pay 5 pound for passage, a pretty hefty sum if you remember that Burns was only paid 3 pound a month, which was worse than his first employer. Despite this, Burns accepted and headed back to the kainga village, agreeing to meet the ship at Poverty Bay. Once again, Team Burns, again consisting of his wife Amotawa, his children, his father in law the rangatira chief Awahi, some other family members and his flax, paddled back to the area of modern day Gisborne. Burns says it was a hard trip, probably not too dissimilar to their first journey escaping from Ngāti Te Whatu-i-apiti, but like that journey some three or four years prior, they made it safe and sound, meeting up with the *Bardaster*. Funnily enough, Burns had to board the ship himself rather than have a longboat get him from the beach cause the agent had apparently made a promise to the local iwi that he didn't follow through with and as such feared they would exact utu, recompensation. Burns smoothed this over, which makes sense as the iwi in question was probably Te Aitanga-a-Mahaki who he had spent some time with. Having all that done, he finally was able to get himself and his flax safely aboard. For whatever reason, Burns decided not to take his wife or children with him so he said his goodbyes, of which he said "I cannot describe how the natives felt but however I will say for myself that no man ever left a place more regretted than I did when leaving New Zealand." As the *Bardaster* sailed off, Barnet Burns left behind the land he grew to love along with the people he grew to love. His chiefs, his iwi, his friends and most importantly his wife and children. He left them on the beach in Poverty Bay, Aotearoa New Zealand bound for Sydney. He would never see them again.

The ship stopped at a few places along its route to Australia with Burns being an invaluable asset due to his knowledge of Te Reo, the Māori language, as well as tikanga customs and the fact he was tattooed. This resulted in them getting some good trade deals and avoiding the fight. Eventually Burns reached Sydney and although he doesn't say about the result of the matter he wished to discuss with his employer, he does say that he was convinced by the *Bardaster's* captain to travel to England in February of 1835 for potentially a similar purpose. Burns was probably pretty keen to get out of Sydney as soon as possible as his moko tattoos were met with curiosity as well as suspicion, mostly from the local convict population who thought he was one of them and had undergone the operation to not be recognised. It's about here that Burns' book ends as it was around this time he was writing it. As such, we lose a lot of detail and visibility on this period of his life.

We don't know what became of his dealings in England other than once there he became a lecturer and a showman, going by the name that he may have been called during his time in New Zealand, Pahe-a-Range. He used his moko tattoos and his typical Māori dress, including kakahu cloak to emphasise his stories and give authenticity. He also apparently showed the preserved head of another chief he had slain, another very common practice for Māori at the time. Not that he really needed to add anything extra, he had actually been to New Zealand and lived those adventures but of course the Victorian crowds liked a good bit of native extravagance with their shows. Honestly I'd argue whether these were actually lectures in the sense that he stood up in front of a crowd and talked. They sound like they may have been closer to a circus act to draw in punters rather than being about learning another culture. This may have in fact been the case as there were some that hated his lectures, one person saying it was "one incongruous jumble of impudence, of ignorance, of low wit and bare faced presumption". Although in saying that there were some that really enjoyed them, saying he made intelligent remarks on New Zealand as well as Māori beliefs and customs. It also looks like the lectures got worse in attendance as they went, the first one likely being packed and the last being only having a handful of filled seats. A potential reason for this is that when Burns returned to England he succumbed to alcoholism, something common among returned Pākehā-Māori. During his lectures he had a woman do a sort of musical intermission part way through who was advertised on posters as "Mrs. Burns". Now, it does seem that Burns married upon his return to England though the sources differ on who this was, some say it was a Rosina Crowther but the source I had sent to me from the National Library says he married a Bridget Cain in June of 1835. Either way, it does seem that he was married fairly quickly after his return.

Burns continued on this path for quite some time living perhaps in Plymouth or a town called Linton outside of Cambridge. We can track his lectures as before each one there was a reprint of his book, the first appearing in 1835, the same year he came back to England. The 9th and last reprint was in 1859, nearly 25 years after his return to Europe. In this last lecture, Burns collapsed from some unknown illness but thankfully recovered. It wasn't to last though. Barnet Burns died in 1860 from 'morbus cordis cirrhosis of liver ascites' which is basically liver failure, so clearly the alcohol caught up with him. He would have been between age 50-53.

This entire time when he comes back to England raises a lot of questions. Why did he stay for a quarter of a decade? Why did he get remarried? Did he ever return to New Zealand? We can't really definitively answer these questions but we do know he potentially intended to go back to Aotearoa. In March 1836, Thomas Morgan, a relative of Burns, was corresponding with some lords at the Colonial Office in regards to Burns wanting to give them "valuable information" about New Zealand. Burns had an idea of establishing a small colony of artisans and tradesmen under his protection and he offered to supply the British government and merchants with timber and flax. This makes a lot of sense as this was something that Burns, as a rangatira chief, was likely within his power and influence to do. What became of this plan, we don't know though Burns did apply later to go to New Zealand on another ship. Again though, we aren't sure what happened there.

There are a lot of what ifs in our knowledge of Barnet Burns, many stemming from the fact our main source on his time here in Aotearoa New Zealand is his own account. This naturally has many problems such as the fact it was written for a British audience so the more grizzly aspects and those that the average reader might find quaint or savage may have been played up. As we mentioned earlier too, he seems to repeat the number of people as being the same in various circumstances which could either be down to bad memory or just trying to make it up as he went along. His words throughout the book also seem counter to his actions upon coming back to England. He professes this great love for Aotearoa and its people and yet as soon he is in England again, he remarries and

stays there for the rest of his life, which ends up being a much longer than his time in New Zealand. There really just is not enough information to tell how he really felt but having read his book, I do feel that there was a genuine love for Aotearoa in him which really makes his story quite sad. Though, that may just be the drama lover in me. After Burns left, his wife Amotawa had one more child, Hori Waiti who was adopted by her relatives in Tokomaru Bay. He was the only surviving child of Burns and had adventures of his own, perhaps even travelling to England himself. He does talk about his father in his own writings, suggesting that Burns escaped from the tribe rather than left of his own will, though it's something we may never know fully. Hori also had children and they had children and today there are a whole bunch of people on the east coast of the North Island that trace their whakapapa, ancestry, to the sailor, trader, rangatira, Pākehā-Māori Barnet Burns.

Next time, we will start on our new topic in our wider discussions of pre-European Māori culture. It will be something that you may not have heard of or at least may not have considered too heavily as it isn't an aspect of Māoridom that you hear a huge amount about in the mainstream. We will be talking about taonga pūoro, Māori musical instruments.

If you want to send me feedback, ask a question, suggest a topic or just have a chinwag you can reach me through email at [historyaotearoa@gmail.com](mailto:historyaotearoa@gmail.com) or Twitter at History Aotearoa or Facebook at History Aotearoa New Zealand Podcast. This podcast is a one man band, if you enjoy listening to me talk history, you can support us through Patreon, buy merch from [historyaotearoa.com](http://historyaotearoa.com) or rate us on iTunes or your preferred podcast platform, it means a lot and helps grow, spreading the story of Aotearoa New Zealand. As always, haere tu atu, hoki tu mai. See you next time!