



View south-westward across the Pukapuka Peninsula towards Mahurangi West. Browne's spar station occupied flat ground behind the bay in the centre, which was once known as Gordon Browne's Bay. Subsequently abbreviated to Browne's Bay, the name has been misplaced on modern maps to the next bay to the north. *Photograph by Alastair Jamieson, Auckland Council*

late 1831, sent a party, under John Skelton, first to Mangōnui in the far north, then to Mercury Bay on the Coromandel Peninsula, in an abortive attempt to fulfil this.⁵⁹ On arrival in Mahurangi, Browne negotiated with Ngāti Pāoa chiefs rights to about 5,000 acres (2023.4 hectares) of land on the south and west sides of the harbour in exchange for goods to the value of £70. There would also have been an agreement to provide labour at an agreed rate in trade goods, and it was probably at this time that Browne entered into an arranged marriage with Ani Patene, daughter of Ngāti Pāoa chief Rawiri Takarua.⁶⁰

In 1832 the Mahurangi region was virtually devoid of Māori settlement. Its former occupants had been several hapū of Te Kawerau, while the Marutūahu confederation of iwi from Hauraki, including Ngāti Pāoa, had seasonal shark-fishing rights there. During the 1820s these groups had come under attack from Ngāpuhi, who at that time had greater access to muskets than those iwi to the south, and by about 1827 the area was abandoned. By the early 1830s the southern iwi were well armed, and Ngāpuhi had suffered several defeats. Ngāti Pāoa had negotiated peace with Ngāpuhi and only just resumed their seasonal visits to Mahurangi by the time Browne's spar station was founded. It was still too risky, however, for Marutūahu people to settle there permanently.

This volatility had an impact on Browne's station. His Māori workforce, predominantly Ngāti Pāoa from Coromandel, were often in fear of attack and at times



refused to return to Mahurangi after visits to their homes. The most serious incident occurred in August 1832, soon after the station was founded. A Ngāpuhi war party, returning from the south under the leadership of Kawiti and Pomare, plundered the station, burning houses and killing cattle. This action was almost certainly muru because Browne declined to pay timber royalties that the two Ngāpuhi chiefs demanded; both had links with people in the Mahurangi district, and Pomare had resource rights through descent links with Ngāti Rongo.

Browne's operations also suffered at the hands of Pākehā. In 1832 Joseph Weller, a trader who appears to have harvested spars at Mahurangi the previous year, confiscated stores, gunpowder and sawn timber from the station on the pretext that the items were repayment of a debt owed by one of Browne's partners. Two years later HMS *Buffalo* arrived in Mahurangi to harvest spars for the British Admiralty, taking trees that Browne had purchased, and offering his Māori workforce a substantially higher rate of pay, including muskets and ammunition. When the *Buffalo* left three months later, there were few accessible trees suitable for spars still standing. Despite these difficulties the station operated for four years, closing in late 1836, with the equipment and many of the personnel transferring to a new station in Mercury Bay.

Browne's workforce varied in size. At first there were about ten Pākehā men, with numbers falling to six in 1834 and rising to between twenty and thirty in 1836. Little is known of their identity or origins. Browne was born in London, migrating to New

'Mr Browne's Establishment' is shown in this detail from a chart made in 1834 during HMS *Buffalo's* stay in Mahurangi Harbour, engraving by J. & C. Walker, 1836, Alexander Turnbull Library, MapColl-832.11aj/1836/Acc. 534v