

SIX PHOTOS

BY DYLAN OWEN



WE TAKE PHOTOS ALL THE TIME. THEY SHOW THE WORLD WHERE WE'VE BEEN AND WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO. BUT PHOTOS ALSO SHOW THE WORLD TO US. AND VERY OLD PHOTOS DO SOMETHING ELSE AGAIN. THEY LET US PEEK INTO HISTORY, AND THIS ENCOURAGES US TO ASK QUESTIONS. WHO IS SHE? WHERE'S THAT? WHAT ARE THEY DOING ... AND WHAT ARE THEY WEARING?

The following photographs are from the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington. This library looks after thousands of photos that capture the history of New Zealand and the Pacific. Some were taken in the 1850s – well over 150 years ago! The people who took these very old photos had to lug around heavy cameras and tripods. They also used dangerous chemicals to develop the photos. But at the time, this was the very latest technology – and it was exciting. Photographers used it to capture what they saw, and this means that we will never forget: the clothes, the buildings, how people played, what they cared about, their celebrations and tragedies. So think of these six photos as a time machine, taking you back ...

KEEP STILL

Try this: keep still for half a minute. Don't move a muscle. Can you do it? Some of the children in this photograph couldn't keep still for ten seconds.

Getting your picture taken in the 1870s was nothing like taking a cellphone selfie. The Ferry family from Whanganui probably spent all morning getting ready for this portrait. Their best clothes would have been laundered and ironed; hair washed, brushed, and curled; boots polished and faces wiped. Then the family would have walked (very carefully to avoid mud) to the photographer's studio. Or maybe they rode in a carriage.

Taking a photo also took a lot of time. The photographer would have told the family where to stand or sit. Parents were often behind their children. Why? So they could keep them still. In those days, up to ten seconds were needed to take a photo. If a person moved during that time, they came out smudged and blurry. Look at the baby. And look at the way the parents each have a hand on a daughter's head. That's to keep them under control! Some of the first photographers refused to deal with children under three. Others used waist or head clamps to keep them still. True.

Family of T.W. Ferry by the studio of
William Harding, c.1874-1876
(ATL reference: 1/4-030717-G)



TE RAUKURA

These people are from Parihaka in Taranaki. From their hob-nailed boots to their hats, they all wear European clothes. During the nineteenth century, Māori had to adapt to Pākehā ways. Many were also under pressure to sell or give up their land for European settlers. Some Māori resisted, like those at Parihaka. As punishment, their whare were destroyed, their men were jailed, and their land was taken.

Perhaps that's why this group looks so serious – and so sad. We don't know if this photograph was taken before or after the government raid on Parihaka in 1881, but we do know these people had begun to fight back in their own unique way. Look closely at the women in the back row. They are wearing raukura – white feathers that were a symbol of the passive resistance movement led by Te Whiti-o-Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi. The mana of these two leaders is still remembered today.

Sometimes it's the smallest thing in a photograph that tells the biggest story.



Group of Māori men, women, and children at Parihaka Pā by an unknown photographer, 1880s (ATL reference: PA 1-0-405-06)

WHERE'S WALLY?

In 1897, Queen Victoria celebrated her sixty-year rule over the British Empire. New Zealand was part of this empire, so people here joined in the celebrations, known as the Diamond Jubilee. In this photo, children in Nelson are wearing fancy dress.

You can see that ideas about costumes have changed a lot! To honour Queen Victoria's rule, some of the girls are dressed in the national costumes of Scotland and Wales (also part of the British Empire). Others have come as Britannia, a mythical woman who represents Britain. The boys' costumes tell a different story. They are soldiers, princes, pirates, and kings – from British history and storybook adventures.

But some of the costumes are downright weird. What about the boy dressed as a fob watch? And would you turn up at a party with your face blackened with soot pretending to be an African-American singer? Or spot the two "Fijians" dressed in tapa-cloth skirts with afro hairstyles and pig tusks. Today, these costumes would be very bad ideas.

I'd give first prize to the two boys near the middle on the right, dressed as Robinson Crusoe and Friday – two famous characters stranded on an island for twenty-eight years. The kids have also brought along a goat and a single-barrel shotgun. Classic.



Children in fancy dress celebrating
Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee
by Edwin Pollard, 1897 (ATL reference: 10x8-0283-G)

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

This is Irini Kemara. Her name in English (Irene) means peace. Maybe there was a special reason she was called this. Maybe there's even a way to find out. Irini was photographed by Samuel Carnell. He was a well-known photographer who took a lot of striking portraits of Māori during the 1880s.

Irini sits with her left side facing the camera. That's because both she and the photographer want us to see her tattoos. The moko kauae or chin tattoo was given to women of high rank. But what about the name tattooed on Irini's left arm: Pera Kemara? Pera is Māori for Bella. Is this Irini's mother, sister, or daughter? We don't know. But we do know that Irini was proud to wear this name. It was too important to cover up.

Irini wears both Māori and Pākehā clothing. Her blouse and headscarf are European. Her double-braided hair style was popular with all New Zealand women. Irini also wears a traditional korowai around her waist. The korowai may have been hers, or perhaps the photographer has given it to her for the photo. On it she rests her hands and a book. Like the tattoos, the book is very deliberate. I wonder what it is – and why she wants us to see it?

*Portrait of Irini Kemara by Samuel Carnell,
July 1888 (ATL reference: 1/4-022019-G)*



TURNING BUSH INTO BUTTER

This family photograph taken at Winiata near Taihape is very different from the one on page nine. It's much more informal. It was also taken when new technology made it easier to photograph what went on in the world outside the studio.

Some of the family are milking the house cows. Two children are perched on carts. One boy holds the family cat. The other stands with the farm dogs. Behind them, you can see a new shed and house.

This photograph shows a much bigger picture than just one family's farm. It was taken during a time of great change, when huge areas of our native bush were being destroyed. Look at the hill. There's native bush – but below that, see the burnt trees? Back then, you first had to clear the land if you wanted a farm. You could chop the bush down – but fire was quicker.

So this picture tells two stories: the hard work that went into making and running a farm – but also the impact of that hard work on our forests. Gone forever. Did the photographer include that hill on purpose? Or was this sight so common in the 1890s that he didn't even notice it?



Māori farm at Winiata, Taihape,
by Edward George Child, 1894
(ATL reference: 1/2-032309-G)

Kitchen interior by William Williams,
c.1880s (ATL reference: 1/2-140288-G)



GUNS IN THE KITCHEN

What's the first thing you notice about this photo? I bet it's not the cups and plates. Aside from the impressive display of weapons, this photograph shows what a simple, tidy kitchen looked like well over a century ago. There's a clock, a candle, a teapot. There's a towel to dry your hands. And just like in the story about Goldilocks, there are three chairs.

But what's missing can be just as important as what's there. So what *is* missing? There are no family portraits or ornaments. There's no rug on the floor or cushions on the chairs. Why might these little extras be absent? This kitchen is in a house in Te Aro, Wellington. Three young men lived here together, so it was a flat and not a family home. It was a nineteenth-century man cave!

The photographer (now well known) lived here. Sometimes the flatmates dressed up for fun. Other photos show them posing with the weapons. These guns and knives tell us a different story about our past. They may have been used for hunting – or perhaps they were even used during the New Zealand Wars.

THE FULL PICTURE

Old photos contain clues about the past. Next time you look at one, think about the following questions to get the full picture:

- What is the first thing you notice in the photo?
- Why do you think the photo was taken?
- What clues tell you how old the photo might be?
- If there are people, what are they doing?
- What can you see in the background?
- What do you think is going on just outside the frame?
- What do you think happened before and after the photo was taken?

Six Photos

by Dylan Owen

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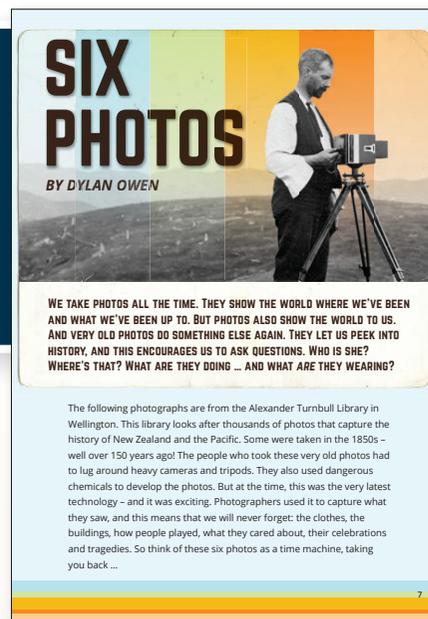
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