

THE PAPANUI BUSH

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“The plains were almost without inhabitant, and nearly without a tree.” This was the first impression the pioneers had as they breasted the steep climb of the bridle path up the hill behind Lyttelton. However, on a second, less cursory look, they would have noted in the middle distance, to the left and to the right, two dark-green patches; the one on the left the patch of trees where the Deans were settled, and that on the right the Papanui Bush, and yet further distant and further right, the Harewood Bush at Oxford.

The Bush was significant well before the settlers saw its advantages. The name *Papanui* is considered to mean “a platform in a tree from which birds are snared (or speared)” referring to the Maori food-catching technique. There does not appear to have been any permanent Maori settlement but the bush was on the west of their well-established track to the pa at Kaiapoi and was a fruitful source for ‘kai (food). In the early days of European settlement “the land fairly swarmed with native quail that were then so plentiful that a traveller or settler could shoot as many as he wished to.”

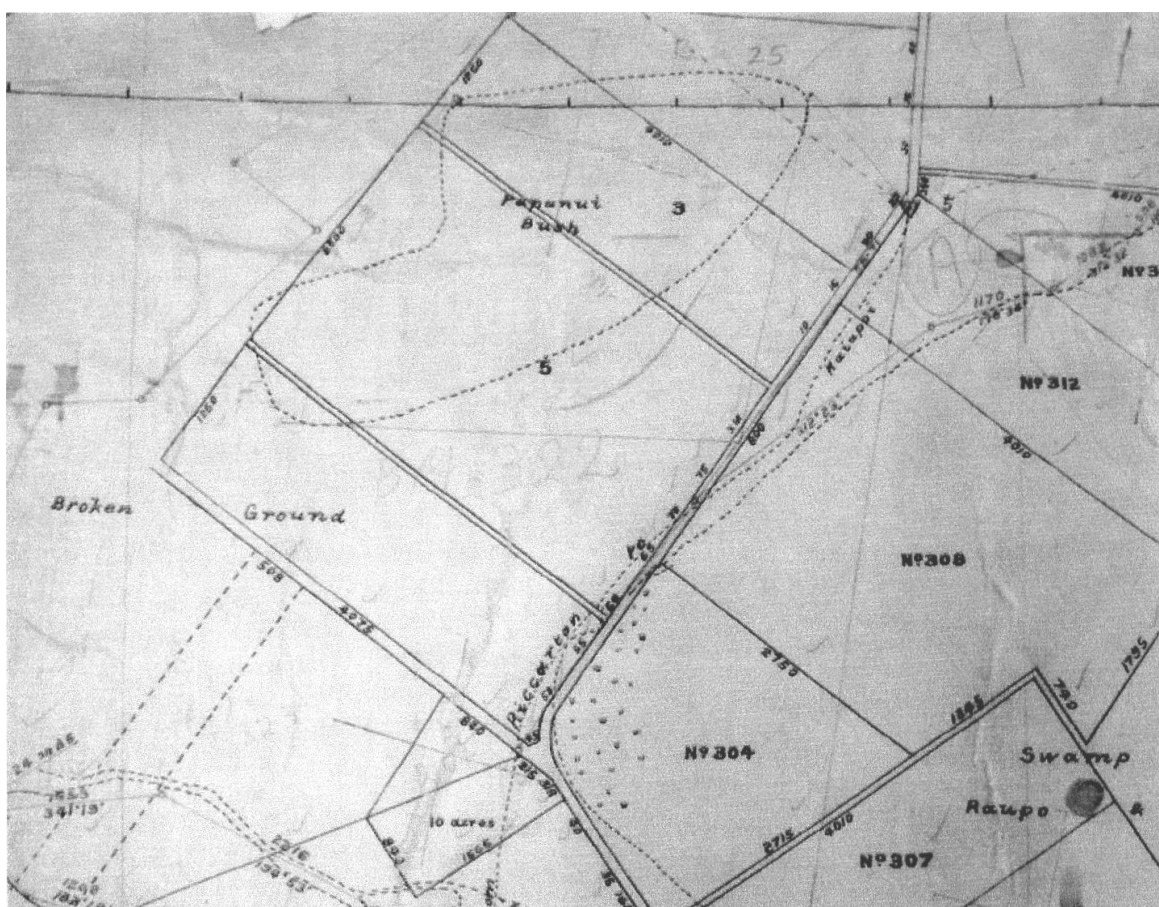
The extent of the Bush is generally given as seventy acres, although some said ninety. Accounts record totara, rimu (red pine), and kahikatea (white pine), matai (black pine) and kanuka. There being so little timber on the plain when the settlers arrived, this area attracted early settlement and soon were established what were referred to as “sawmills” where enterprising men set up for pit-sawing, and the first hotel set up in Papanui in a dwelling-house was named “The Sawyers Arms”. The name still exists, being given to the road on whose corner it stood.

Just a few months after the first Canterbury Association colonists arrived in December 1850, a land ballot was held and the Rural Section (RS) number on land documents indicates the order of choice. RS3 was 50 acres of the Papanui Bush selected by Miss Anne Bowen, sister of Charles Bowen, secretary to John Robert Godley (regarded as the founder/father of Canterbury). RS5, also containing part of the Bush, was the 100 acre selection of Mr William Guise Brittan who was the Association’s Land Agent.

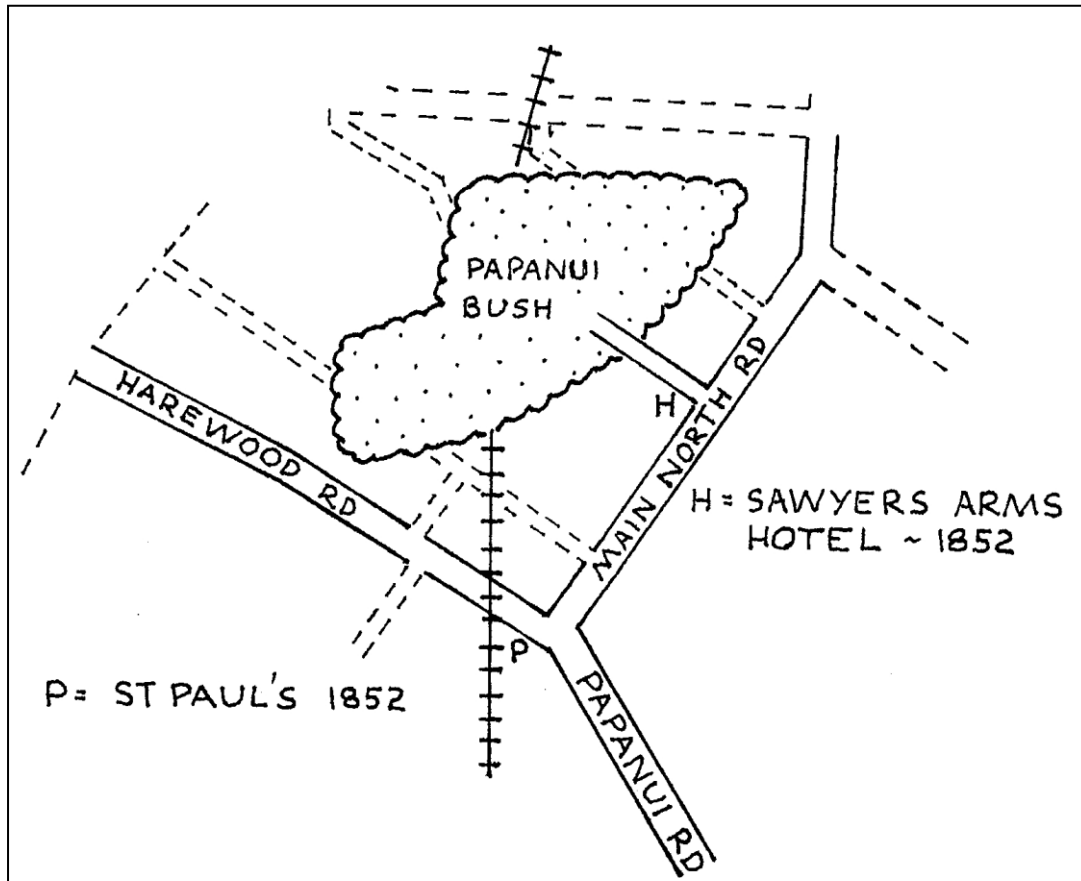
Timber was used for buildings: old identities report a house with a framework of black pine, and a two-storied cottage built from wood that was part of the Papanui Bush. There are newspaper advertisements for

shingles, some certainly was cut as fire-wood. It was a hazardous undertaking, getting the timber from Papanui into Christchurch. "Only an expert bullock driver would attempt to cart timber from the bush to Christchurch going both there and back in one day."

"The last tree in the Papanui Bush, a totara, stood for some years after its fellows were gone." By all accounts, the Bush was all cut out after about five years. It is now memorialised by a planting in the Papanui Domain, in Sawyers Arms Road on the east side of the railway line.



Our thanks to Land Information N.Z. for allowing us to photograph this original 'Black Map' of the Papanui area. The map was drawn by the Chief Surveyor Thomas Cass and signed by him, approved by J. Thomas as Chief Surveyor, 31st March 1856, and shows the location and extent of the Papanui Bush.



Map showing location of Papanui Bush in relation to St Paul's in 1852.

Postscript. - In this Journal No.15, 1981, p.15-16 Joe Cartman described the plan of the Waimairi County Council to recreate a sample of Papanui Bush at Owen Mitchell Park on Grimseys Road opposite the east end of Wingate Street. An open six hectare field was chosen which included the sites of two springs. The maps accompanying Warren's article show that Owen Mitchell Park is north-east of the forest extant in 1856, but it was undoubtedly part of a prehistoric forest as logs were dug up during drainage work. Joe saw this as an exciting project and it was a forerunner of many revegetation projects around the city in recent years. Two patches of bush were planted, mainly *Pittosporum tenuifolium* and *P. eugenioides*, and *Hoheria angustifolia* with some *Sophora* and *Cordyline*. These two plantings survive and are now substantial trees in a dense thicket. With local body amalgamation Joe's job changed and he no longer has any influence over this planting. They are managed in such a way that natural regeneration will probably not take place, but they mark the presence of an earlier bush on this site. Editor and Joe Cartman.