

## J H Menzies: a reappraisal

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Principally active from the early 1880s to c. 1910, John Henry Menzies (1839–1919) was a carver in wood and stone, and an architectural designer. About 80 pieces of his furniture are extant; Rehutai, one of the three houses he designed and decorated also survives, as does his church, St Luke's. He also produced the pattern studies for *Maori Patterns Painted and Carved* (1910, 1975). Menzies' creative period coincided with the growth of the New Zealand Arts and Crafts movement and with New Zealand's search for a national identity. His creative output reflected both of these currents. In particular, the indigenous is apparent in his work, both flora, and the focus of this essay, the figures and patterns of Māori art. The surviving works, with the interpretations and themes they embody, serve to inform us about identity formation and Pākehā perceptions of Māori art. Several family histories tell us about Menzies' life, particularly as a settler, farmer and patriarch. However, surprisingly, he has received little scholarly attention as an artist and interpreter of burgeoning national identity. This essay reviews the likely influences of anthropology, the role of identity, and some of Menzies' main decorative themes, with a particular focus on the works that exist in the public realm.

**Keywords:** J H Menzies, Māori art, architectural design, carving, kōwhaiwhai painting, museum collections, ethnology, whare whakairo, art history, folk art furniture, decorative and applied arts, Menzies Bay, Banks Peninsula, Canterbury Museum, Akaroa Museum, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

### Introduction

John Henry Menzies (1839–1919) (Fig. 1) was from the North West of England. The son of a cotton merchant, he spent his formative years at Ringway in rural Cheshire, a short distance from Manchester, the commercial centre where his father conducted his business (Menzies 2003). Dissatisfied with his first occupation working in his uncle's maritime insurance firm (Jones, Palmer and Company), he emigrated to New Zealand in 1860 with the intention of farming. After owning a succession of three farms in Southland, he purchased a fourth at an eastern bay of Banks Peninsula, where he moved with his family in 1877. It has become known as Menzies Bay. Here Menzies carved furniture and designed and decorated three houses and a church during a creative period that began about 1882 and ended around 1910

with his retirement to Christchurch. Menzies carved prolifically incorporating contemporary fashionable botanical reliefs, Celtic motifs, text, but most importantly, as this paper will discuss, Māori designs.

To date, Menzies' creative output is under-researched, and occupies a peripheral position in the art history of the era. However, the way in which it addressed the currents of a burgeoning national identity cannot be denied. This research calls for his creative output to be reassessed, contextualised and reconsidered as of outstanding national significance.

About 80 pieces of carved furniture survive. These are mostly in the private ownership of descendants with a small number in public museums. Menzies built and decorated three houses for his family. The first, the Menzies



**Figure 1.** John Henry Menzies (1839–1919), c. 1900. Private collection

Bay homestead Glen Mona built 1878–1879, was carved with botanical motifs (Anonymous 1890; Menzies 1970). Rehutai, built 1894–1895 for his son, survives and was designed around a central hall in the form of a Māori meeting house. In 1907, Glen Mona burnt down, and its replacement followed the Rehutai model, but sadly it also burnt down in the late 1920s. No interior photographs of these lost houses are known. In 1905–1906 Menzies designed, built and extensively decorated St Luke’s Church at Little Akaloa; this and Rehutai are rated Category 1 buildings on the Heritage New Zealand List (Heritage New Zealand 1993, 2001). During the 1880s Menzies developed his chiefly botanical carved decoration to incorporate various Celtic motifs, text, and an extensive array of Māori figures and patterns; the latter being used extensively. In 1910, *Maori Patterns Painted and Carved* was published, a collection of his pattern studies with an introduction detailing his understanding of Māori art. The original painted pattern studies

for this publication survive as a single bound volume in private ownership. In addition, an (as yet) un-catalogued number of figurative sketches and paintings also survive, again in private ownership.

Menzies had limited contact with Māori and Māori culture, and there is no evidence of Māori carving tutors. Although Menzies sought to copy and reproduce Māori patterns accurately, there is no suggestion that origins, meanings or indigenous uses were either understood or of concern. Rather, his use of Māori patterns was at his own aesthetic discretion. When he began carving in the 1880s the only significant text illustrating Māori art was Owen Jones’ *Grammar of Ornament*, first published in 1856. Jones approved of Māori design but although the book contained chromolithographic illustrations of Māori art it did not supply enough illustrated examples to account for the variation in Menzies’ art in the 1880s and 1890s. It was not until Hamilton’s *Maori Art* of 1901 (originally published in parts from 1896–1900) that a substantial illustrated text on Māori art became available. Yet Menzies had become a proficient carver of Māori patterns during the 1880s.

There is little direct evidence of the extent of his research into Māori art. Unfortunately the sort of working drawings, notes and papers one would normally expect an artist to generate have not survived, neither has Menzies’ library. The house fire at the first Bay homestead in 1907 razed the building (Anonymous 1907): the likely explanation of the lacuna in archival sources. We do not know his design process other than he was associated with Christchurch furniture makers A J White & Co (Anonymous 1895a, 1895b). Anecdotally he appears to have ordered furniture, had the parts sent to him for carving, and then sent the carved pieces back to the cabinet maker for final assembly and finishing. Menzies rarely signed or dated his work, so it is difficult to develop a detailed chronology of his output and thereby identify changes and currents in his expression. However, his aims and intentions

can be extrapolated from the works and a small amount of published material.

Menzies wrote letters to the *Press* (1899a, 1899b, 1910b), he was mentioned in several newspaper articles (Anonymous 1890, 1895a, 1895b, 1898a, 1898b, 1910) and a draft version of his introduction to *Maori Patterns* (1910a) survives in the Canterbury Museum collection (accession number 2003.52.54). These reveal he learnt patterns by studying photographs as well as direct study of carved objects, although sources are not named in either case.

In this essay I will examine the local possibilities for the acquisition of knowledge about Māori carving from two perspectives. First, I will consider the people available locally who were capable of acting as informants on the subject. Second, I will consider where Menzies could have accessed carvings. Direct study of Māori carvings would have been necessary to achieve the fine detail that Menzies reproduced in his carving. Since there is no evidence of Māori tutelage, I work from the premise that his acquisition of knowledge about Māori art was mediated through Pākehā channels in the form of ethnologists and private and public collections.

Various family histories record his life, occupation and achievements. The main source regarding Menzies' early life is his *Family history to 1877* (2003). This records no formal art training, and makes just one mention of carving as a schoolboy, and only in passing. The book's main focus is on farming. Menzies' wife Frances' *The Recollections of Frances Elizabeth Menzies* (2004) records family life. Janet Hector, a descendant who edited the volume for publication, appended transcribed letters and a chronology of family events. Menzies' grandson Ian (1970) wrote about his grandparents and life at Menzies Bay drawing on their writing, and adding in recollections of their contemporaries. However, in these family histories, Menzies' carving was considered a hobby as his occupation was farmer, even though they observed that carving was increasingly his major preoccupation.

Menzies' chief audience was his family. Today, most of his surviving furniture remains in family ownership. This family focus has done little for his wider reputation as most of his output has effectively remained hidden from public and scholarly view.

Menzies has received rather scant critical attention, the main sources being Halliday (1996a, 1996b), mentions by Petersen (2000, 2001) and the research and findings of Heritage New Zealand undertaken in the aforementioned building listings. The overall brevity in coverage, and the particular foci of these sources, has led to an effective compartmentalisation of his work. He is viewed as an amateur architectural designer (Lochhead 1999: 173; Halliday 1996a; 1996b), or as working in the arena of decorative and applied arts (Petersen 2000: 61; 2001: 113; Calhoun 2004: 8), or as an ethnological recorder (Neich 1994: 32), never as all three at once.

The aim here is to develop on the current critical attention by producing an overview of Menzies' creative period, which takes a holistic view of his art. In the course of the essay I will identify some likely sources and influences, and draw out themes that are apparent in the body of work. The contention is that Menzies should be understood as an artist and a craftsman in quite a contemporary sense – as someone who was enhancing everyday architecture, using it to engage and influence the viewer through imagery that addressed identity and nationality. This was achieved in different ways – by putting carved furniture into existing homes and by designing his own buildings, thereby creating his own version of the New Zealand house or church. Much of his artwork, whether furniture or buildings, can be read as addressing the question of the appropriate form of decoration or architecture for New Zealand. Although Menzies produced his work in the relative isolation of Menzies Bay, his display of carved furniture in Christchurch exhibitions in 1882, 1895 and 1899 (Canterbury Society of Arts 1892 in 1881–1910; Anonymous 1895a, 1895b; JH Menzies 1899b), his letters to the

*Press* (1899a, 1899b, 1910b), his book (1910a), and his creation of a public building (St Luke's) show he participated in the wider society. Certainly he appropriated indigenous art, but the focus here is what he did with it, not the politics of the act of appropriation.

### **Understanding Māori carving**

In the absence of a surviving archive, it is important to understand the context of Menzies' exposure to Māori art, and his access to understanding it. There is some surviving evidence that he conversed and corresponded with ethnological researchers, and there were a number conveniently available locally. The following considers the people Menzies could have met with to discuss the subject of Māori art and concludes with an examination of Menzies' introduction to *Maori Patterns Painted and Carved* where he explains his understanding of Māori carving. I will begin by briefly reviewing the position of anthropology in New Zealand at the time.

During this period, ethnologists were actively informing Pākehā society about Māori culture and the Māori past. This played an important role in the absorption of aspects of the indigenous into national identity. Sorrenson (1979), Meijl (1996) and Belich (1996, 1997, 2001) have historicised the anthropological writing. Across the board was an undercurrent belief that Māori were a 'dying' race, a convenient myth suggesting the land was being left vacant for the new settlers. At the extreme, the likes of Stevenson Percy Smith (1840–1922) and Edward Tregear (1846–1931) created fanciful myths in their attempts to explain the origins of the Māori. While Menzies was creatively active (1880s–1910), the anthropology effectively united Māori history and settler history into a single linear narrative. As Kynan Gentry has summarised, Māori history was presented "as a warm-up to the main event of European arrival, both enlivening and lengthening New Zealand's history and adding to it a dash of myth and romance" (Gentry 2015: 61).

Interestingly, this occurred during the period Belich (2001) terms "recolonial" (c. 1885–1901), where New Zealand was identifying more closely with Britain than in its earlier colonial phase. As Stafford and Williams (2006) note, it was also a period where the colonial-born children of settlers were coming of age. Although Britain, or England, was the mother country and home, many of this generation had never been there. It was New Zealand that they knew and identified with. During this period the romantic Maoriland imagery was created in literature (Stafford and Williams 2006), the haka was adopted as the national war dance (Gentry 2015: 76), and the kiwi and silver fern began their roles as national symbols (Wolfe 1991).

Although there is a paucity of documented evidence, by considering who was available within Menzies' local and regional ambit (Gardner 1979), it is possible to reconstruct a likely network of contacts that informed Menzies about Māori past and culture. This group was interconnected professionally and socially forming a loose community or interest group in Māori ethnology. Unlike S Percy Smith and Tregear, these researchers, are not remembered for their "rampant" theorising (T O'Regan in Beattie 2009: 7).

The most convenient contact by locality was Reverend James West Stack (1835–1919). Stack served as Anglican missionary to Canterbury Māori living near his flock at Tuahiwi and frequently visited Banks Peninsula Ngāi Tahu (Reed 1935b). He was relieving minister at Little Akaloa and then vicar of the nearby parish of Duvauchelle from 1879 to 1883, effectively making him Menzies' parish priest just prior to the beginning of Menzies' creative period (Beckett 1960: 29; Murray 2012). Stack was the New Zealand-born son of a missionary and had plenty of exposure to Māori architecture and decoration during his childhood at North Island missions (Reed 1935a). On his return as a missionary he had also seen the famed decorated whare karakia (Māori church) at Otaki as well as Tamihana

Te Rauparaha's decorated house there (Reed 1935b). He was fluent in te reo Māori, and was a friend of many prominent Māori and Pākehā. He was an ethnological recorder, published histories on Banks Peninsula and South Island Māori (1884, 1898), presented papers to the Canterbury Philosophical Society and was involved in obtaining and erecting the Ngāti Porou meeting house Hau Te Ana Nui o Tangaroa at Canterbury Museum in 1874 along with naturalist Walter Buller, another missionary's son (Ellis 2016: 214–227; Stack 1875: 172–176; Haast 1948: 683–685). Stack was a close friend of Dr Julius von Haast, the first director of Canterbury Museum, and researched anthropological questions on his behalf including questions posed by Haast's correspondent, Charles Darwin (Reed 1935a). Stack would have been a valuable source of information about Māori culture and art for Menzies, and an insert in Canterbury Museum's bound copy of *Maori Patterns* (1910a) credits Stack as supplying 11 of the Māori proverbs reproduced in the book. Moreover, Stack was able to introduce Menzies to a network of informants and fellow researchers.

Stack's friend Tamati Tikao, an Anglican lay preacher who was living at Wainui on Akaroa Harbour in the 1880s, would have made a useful contact for Menzies. Tikao was the brother of Piuraki or John Love Tikao, signatory to the Treaty of Waitangi at Ōnuku, also in Akaroa Harbour, in May 1840. He is known to have made two mere (greenstone clubs) for Stack, which were delivered to Julius von Haast who in turn sent them to Dr Ferdinand von Hochstetter in Vienna (Reed 1935a: 77, 80). Tikao also produced a large pātiti parāoa (axe-shaped whalebone weapon) (Canterbury Museum accession number (CMA) 1952.30.498). However, these weapons were undecorated and Tikao is not known to have been a wood carver. Menzies may also have consulted Tamati's son Teone Taare Tikao, noted for his knowledge of Ngāi Tahu oral history and traditions, and the source on Ngāi Tahu cultural practice in *Tikao Talks*

(Beattie 2009). However, there is no mention of woodcarving in this book.

Hakopa te Ata o Tu (c. 1798–1883) from Kaiapoi was another of Stack's Māori informants that Menzies could have consulted. Stack wrote to Haast from Duvauchelle in 1882 with his "Notes on Maori manufacture of greenstone" based on an account from Hakopa (Reed 1935a: 270–274). Stack spoke highly of Hakopa, describing him as "my old friend" and as "one of the few real old Maori chiefs – one who knows what he is talking about when you ask him questions relating to the customs of the people prior to the advent of the Pakeha" (Reed 1935a: 270). Given his proximity to the whare whakairo (carved house) Tutekawa at Tuahiwi north of Christchurch (discussed below), Hakopa may have been a valuable source on its history and meanings. However, as with Tikao, perhaps not in the practicalities of carving.

Stack knew the Williams family of North Island missionaries. Herbert Williams recorded and wrote about the kōwhaiwhai rafter patterns reproduced in Hamilton's *Maori Art* (1901). Given the similarity of Menzies' and Williams' approach to recording Māori patterns the prospect of some prior collusion is tantalising although no supporting evidence has been uncovered to date. Menzies certainly corresponded with Augustus Hamilton in 1899 (Alexander Turnbull Library MS-Papers-0072-04). Although Menzies was well established in his carving by this point, Hamilton would nonetheless have been a source for expanding Menzies knowledge of Māori patterns, including through the supply of photographs.

Samuel Hurst Seager, the Christchurch Arts and Crafts architect and a teacher at the Canterbury College School of Art was another likely contact. Menzies would have encountered Seager through the Canterbury Society of Arts, where he is listed in the catalogues as an Ordinary Member from 1892 to 1897 (Canterbury Society of Arts 1881–1910). Seager published his *Notes on Maori Art* in 1900, although he was outspoken in his belief

Māori art and architecture was inappropriate as the basis for a national style (Lochhead 1999: 174). Seager and Stack were both involved in the Kaiapoi Pā monument (1898–1899), along with Charles Kidson (another teacher at the School of Art) who produced the carved elements (Stocker 2004). Although Kidson reproduced Māori carvings in Mount Somers stone for the monument it is unlikely this was an influence on Menzies who was already an experienced carver by this time, including in stone in the decoration of the fireplaces at Rehutai.

A single reference suggests Edward Tregear was also a contact. He is credited with supplying Menzies with a translation of a Māori proverb (Anonymous 1898b).

Overall, although many of these contacts may have claimed expertise in their knowledge about carving, none (with the exception of Kidson) are known to have been carvers in their own right. It appears that Menzies walked that path alone, creating his own approaches to reproducing the patterns and figures of Māori art. Nevertheless Menzies was able to access a network of expertise on Māori art and culture generally. It was in Menzies' introduction to *Maori Patterns* (1910a), late in his carving career, that the distillation of his understanding of Māori carving was most fully expressed:

*Maori carving, as practised among the Maoris long ago, was a sacred work .... Every pattern had a name, and also a Karakia belonging to it .... no carving could be done amongst the Maoris except by a man of good birth. If any mistake – gross, wilful mistake – in the pattern was made, then the work became very unlucky .... In fact, a Hara had been committed, and ill-luck would follow. ... the various patterns once had a meaning ... but ... the meaning was lost long ago, just as the meaning of most of the Karakias was probably lost long ago too. .... Maori carving was done in the old days, especially the beautifully and finely carved weapons and boxes, by old men. They sat on a sand hill, or in some sheltered place, with a small boy to watch*

*for enemies, and carved; they carried the work with them on a journey as well. Also there were guilds of carvers who went from place to place, and charged a high price for their work .... Maori carving long ago was an extremely slow and carefully executed work, done without the aid of iron or steel tools; it was done with shells and greenstone, and sometimes burnt out, I think, as well. ... I think that at the present day many of the young Maoris dread doing Maori carving, not knowing the Karakias; they consider it a rather doubtful art, surrounded by a risk of possible ill-luck. ... many of these patterns could be both painted and carved .... I have tried my best to very carefully reproduce these beautiful patterns. ... They belong only to New Zealand .... it now remains for some Maori of good birth to improve on what I have done.*

Menzies indicates an understanding that carving was tapu (sacred) performed by men of high birth, supplying a description not incompatible with Neich (2008) or Tikao's discussions of karakia (incantations) and the handing down of knowledge (Beattie and Tikao 1939). The description of the old men carving is reminiscent of Stack's 1882 'Notes on Maori manufacture of greenstone' for Haast (Reed 1935a: 270–274), especially the final comments on the making of a mere. Menzies proposes that the art was in danger of being lost because of disruptions in the passing of the correct karakia (prayers) and tikanga (rituals) from one generation to another. Without that knowledge the younger generation believed they would put themselves in danger if they were to begin carving. Implicit is that this disruption was caused by population loss, and might allude to the current belief that Māori were a dying race (Sorrenson 1979: 73; Belich 1997: 10–11). Menzies saw his collection of patterns as a way to preserve them and make them accessible, he also saw his work needed carrying forward by Māori. Although not quoted above, he professed a high opinion of woven patterns and urged that a similar book of woven patterns

be produced by a suitably knowledgeable Māori woman. Change had occurred from traditional (pre-European) life but he believed Māori should continue their art (as well as Pākehā like himself). He wrote of his concern for preserving the patterns, but also of their importance to New Zealand (1910b):

*I am anxious that this book of Maori painting and carving shall show to New Zealanders what a beautiful art, belonging only to New Zealand, belongs to them. My object ... was to prevent these patterns – old, old patterns from being forgotten and disappearing like the birds and trees ...*

Māori patterns, in other words, were to Menzies an art form to be saved and valued by the nation.

### Access to carving

Beattie's 1920 investigations (2009) found woodcarving was not being practiced by Ngāi Tahu anywhere in the South Island by the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The traditional craft of carving was outside of the living memory of his informants with only a few surviving examples recalled. Compared with more northern iwi (tribes), woodcarving was never very strong among Ngāi Tahu. A rare example was Tutekawa at Tuahiwi, although this was dismantled by Menzies' time. Despite Menzies living near several Māori communities on Banks Peninsula, there were no major carved works, let alone practising carvers to visit. Certainly J H Menzies (2003) makes no



**Figure 2.** “Nearing completion”, a photograph of the decorated interior of the whare whakairo (carved house) Hau te Ana Nui o Tangaroa showing Pākehā carpenters posing with carvings from the frontage. Among the carved pieces yet to be attached are the koruru (carved face from apex of the maihi or bargeboards) surmounted by a tekoteko (carved figure) at the centre of the group of men. To the extreme right is a pare (carved lintel panel over a door or window) on its side. Photograph by John Bradley & Co, c. 1897, CMA 19XX.2.4905.

mention of experiencing Māori carving before 1877, and in the years after there remains little evidence for Menzies having close contact with Māori carvers or carvings existing in a Māori community context. Therefore, Menzies' exposure to Māori carving is likely to have occurred in Pākehā contexts, in museums and exhibitions, through photographs originating from museums or private Pākehā collectors.

Menzies owned a house in Christchurch from the mid-1880s, which allowed him periods of exposure to urban life (Menzies 2004). This meant *Hau te Ana Nui o Tangaroa* (Fig. 2), the *whare whakairo* (carved house) at Canterbury Museum, was Menzies' most convenient subject for first hand study of Māori carving.



**Figure 3.** Sitting room at Puke-Puke showing an arrangement of Menzies' furniture. A pātaka cabinet is centre and on it is a carved bowl. To the right the legs of a carved dining table are visible, with perhaps a carved tray and the leaves of the table against the wall. Bottom left are a carved stool and a copy of *Maori Patterns* (1910). Private collection

*Hau te Ana Nui* had been erected as an annex to the Museum and was utilised as a gallery space to display the Museum's collection of taonga (treasures). Purchased semi-complete in 1874, its original Ngāti Porou carver Hone Taahu and his apprentice Tamati Ngakaho came to Christchurch to finish the building, which had a fully carved interior and kōwhaiwhai paintings (Ellis 2016: 214–215, 217). To protect the building from rotting in the ground, the elements of the house were attached to a framework built by Pākehā carpenters on a concrete foundation. "Fluted kauri boards were substituted for toe-toe reeds inside, and the outside of the building was covered with corrugated iron, instead of the ordinary covering of raupo and toe-toe" (Stack 1875: 173). It is interesting to note that "fluted" boards were adopted by Menzies in both Rehutai and St Luke's Church; surely he took this idea from *Hau Te Ana Nui*. Halliday (1996b) believed that patterns from this building were sources for *Maori Patterns* (1910a) based on an annotated copy in Canterbury Museum that reputedly records locations of origin for 40 of the patterns, with 13 coming from that Museum. The provenance of these annotations is unclear but by virtue of its convenience it is a likely source.

Stack was in a position to facilitate Menzies' access to the remains of Tutekawa at Tuahiwi, the closest example of carvings in a Māori community. Beattie mentioned seeing five carved pieces from this meeting house when he visited (2009: 252). Halliday (1996b: 34–38) also saw this source as a likely influence on Menzies' carving.

The only record of contact with Māori carving within a Māori community is from a little-known sketch book by Menzies with the date "30/04/87", owned as a reproduction by the Alexander Turnbull Library and Akaroa Museum. The sketches record a holiday to the thermal spas at Te Aroha, Ohinemutu and Rotorua, showing landscapes, town plans and a sketch of a flowering clematis vine. No Māori art is recorded in the sketches, but contact with Māori art was unavoidable at Ohinemutu where



there was the magnificently carved meeting house Tamatekapua and other carved buildings also. After all, the attraction to tourists was not just the thermal activity, but the opportunity of interaction with the indigenous people and their culture (Stafford 1986: 78). At Ohinemutu, Menzies would surely have observed Māori carvers in action, even if only in the production of tourist pieces (Neich 1983, 2001).

Although not documented as such, this must have been an important moment in Menzies' life as an artist and perhaps he made studies of the art that have not survived. Certainly this trip heralds a period of *whare whakairo* (carved house) influenced art. The first recorded piece of Menzies' furniture with a Māori art influence is in 1890 when he made a chiffonier "representing a Maori whare" (Anonymous 1890). Described among descendants as *pātaka* (storehouse) cabinets or cupboards, three such chiffoniers are known to survive. These comprise a model *whare* or *pātaka* with a central door sitting above a pedestal cupboard, the whole carved in Māori patterns and figures (Fig. 3). In 1892, the Canterbury Society of Arts annual exhibition catalogue lists "Clock case, Maori carving" by Menzies. Only two extant clock cases are known and both incorporate the *whare* design. In these, the clock face is in the centre of a *whare whakairo* model, which is sitting above a case, again all carved in Māori patterns (Fig. 4). The *whare whakairo* form is also seen in an extant bookcase (Fig. 5) and the *raparapa* (bargeboard ends) from a *whare* are incorporated into an armchair. The form of these pieces of furniture is so unusual that Menzies must have either constructed them himself or was very closely involved with the cabinet making. In his architecture from this period the *whare* occurred in the 1894 house, *Rehutai*, and was later used in the second Bay homestead (lost to fire) (Menzies 1970: 94).

During the late 1800s, decorated buildings – meeting houses and *pātaka* – were sought after by private collectors and public museums (such as Canterbury Museum) (Ellis 2016: 215–216). As large works of artistic expression,



**Figure 4.** Long case clock with *whare whakairo* style clock case. Private collection. Photograph: D Smith

they aroused deep interest, and in the context of the dying race myth, their collection in the later nineteenth century was motivated by a desire to "document and preserve traditional Maori culture and art" with an emphasis on "high culture" (Meijl 1996: 325), even though the carved meeting house was a nineteenth century innovation (Ellis 2016: 216). Since his understanding of Māori culture was primarily in a Pākehā context, and since the evidence suggests that Menzies' primary experiences of Māori art were *whare whakairo*, it is perhaps not surprising that the *whare whakairo* form is found incorporated into Menzies' furniture and architecture. The style can be read as an attempt to reconcile his own experience of Māori art, and what he had read and been told, with his artistic endeavours. The incorporation



**Figure 5.** Bookcase in the whare whakairo style.  
Private collection. Photograph: D Smith

of the whare form is not only a strong design theme, but unique in the nation's furniture and architectural history, although not acknowledged in professional circles at the time.

It is worth pausing here to consider the effect of Menzies' furniture. The introduction of an elaborately carved piece into a domestic room was always going to alter that room by its presence. The majority of his furniture brought Māori carving into family domestic interiors. Pākehā encountering this furniture, or living with it, were confronted with an aspect of indigenous culture, although the indigenous people from where it originated were absent. This might be viewed as an indigenising presence, an insistence by Menzies that Pākehā also owned this culture because it was a culture of New Zealand. However, even in the early twentieth century when the Arts and Crafts movement brought such furniture to the

height of its popularity (Petersen 2000), and references to Māori art became part of design education and practice (Calhoun 2000, 2004), the actual take-up by Pākehā in their domestic interiors was very low (Petersen 2000: 71). Orientalism, that is Eastern cultural themes, and Medieval Revival were far more common at the time in New Zealand interior decoration. This indicates Menzies' commitment to creating a hybrid form of domestic decoration not only as individualistic, but against the grain of professional and popular practice. Menzies' intended effect should not be forgotten, a point I will pick up on below.

### **The buildings**

Although Menzies constructed buildings on his three farms in Southland, none are recorded as decorated (Heritage New Zealand date unknown a, date unknown b).

Of the three decorated houses Menzies constructed at Menzies Bay, only Rehutai survives. His other surviving decorated building is St Luke's Church at Little Akaloa. They are quite different from one another. Rehutai is wooden and Menzies' design for the house represents an innovation in domestic architecture. Conversely, the church is concrete with an interior lined in stone. It follows a traditional cruciform design, and gains its distinction through its elaborate and thorough decoration. These projects were ambitious undertakings, their outcome carefully conceived at the beginning, and their complex decoration executed with energy and flourish.

The Category 1 heritage listings of these buildings is justified by Menzies' reproduction of Māori art, his technical accomplishments and as statements in turn-of-the-century debates about a New Zealand architectural style, with an emphasis on their novelty as Pākehā constructions utilising Māori art (Heritage New Zealand 1993, 2001). However, they should also be valued for the originality of their interiors, and for their continuity with his other artistic endeavours, that is, as key



**Figure 6.** Rehutai Hallway showing the key elements in Māori architecture: central ridge pole painted with kōwhaiwhai (curvilinear) designs, heke (exposed rafters) also with kōwhaiwhai paintings, which lead down to pilasters performing the role of poupou (vertical rafter supports). Photograph: D Smith, 2012

parts of his oeuvre. They are, of course, also artistic works in their own right, expressions of a single creative vision. Nationally they should be valued more highly as examples of Arts and Crafts architecture in the way that (for example) the Charles Rennie Mackintosh library at the Glasgow School of Art (1897–1909) is valued as an art work in its own right and for its contribution to British architecture. Menzies' buildings emphasised the vernacular (a maxim of the Arts and Crafts movement) in his use of local materials and indigenous decorative arts, making a statement for a distinctively New Zealand form of the Arts and Crafts movement.

*Rehutai*: Begun in 1894 and built for his son and daughter-in-law, the heart of Rehutai is a

large hallway 9.5 metres long, 3 metres wide with an open ceiling leading up to a central ridgepole 4 metres above the floor (Heritage New Zealand date unknown b). Although on approach it appears a simple weatherboard house with corrugated iron roof, this ordinary exterior acts as a foil to the decoration of the interior, where the large hall was intended to approximate to the interior of a Māori meeting house (Fig. 6). The house can be seen as a response to the Arts and Crafts principle of taking inspiration from vernacular buildings. The key elements in Māori architecture are present here: heke (exposed rafters) with kōwhaiwhai (curvilinear) designs, which lead down to pilasters performing the role of poupou (vertical rafter supports). Here the poupou are left blank, unlike a meeting house where they are normally carved with ancestor figures. Between these and between the heke are wooden rimu panels moulded to imitate the raupō and toetoe linings traditionally used in Māori buildings. The hall decoration is dominated by painted kōwhaiwhai in red and white supported by painted proverbs in te reo Māori running around the cornice in gold lettering (Fig. 7). Carved tiki heads are at the base of each poupou while the "capital" is carved in a zig-zag pattern (Fig. 8). Eight doorways lead off the hall. The door architraves are painted with simple kōwhaiwhai designs, and reeded panels are also used in the doors.

The principal rooms leading off the main hall have carved stone fireplaces with carved mantelpieces and surrounds, each taking a different theme. The drawing room has a Māori design with elaborately carved surround and mantel supported by manaia (profile) figures, although the carved stone fireplace had been removed when the author visited in 2012 (Fig. 9). This room also has a fretwork frieze in a Māori pattern over each window and as a room division. Reeded wall panelling runs around the perimeter.

Fireplaces in two other rooms are carved with botanical reliefs with obvious national symbolism. One is carved with roses and



**Figure 7.** Hallway, Rehutai, showing kōwhaiwhai painting on heke (rafters) and around doorway. Note text in te reo Māori on cornice and the treatment of the poupou (pilasters). Photograph: D Smith, 2012



**Figure 8.** Tiki heads carved at the bases of the poupou, Rehutai hallway. Also note the panelling between the uprights. Photograph: D Smith, 2012

shamrocks with the Gaelic greeting “Caed mille [sic] failte”. Another has Scotch thistle with a central figure of a savage head in a shield, the Menzies clan crest. A third fireplace also has a clan theme, decorated with thistle and sprigs of rowan or mountain ash (*Sorbus aucuparia*). Another room reputedly had a fireplace carved with native New Zealand birds, although this too was missing in 2012 (Halliday 1996b: 11). The utility side of the house is not decorated.

When lived in, Rehutai was furnished (although not exclusively) with Menzies’ furniture, which incorporated similar blends of carved motifs. A photograph of the drawing room, c. 1894 (Fig. 9), shows a pātaka cupboard completely decorated with Māori carving, a drop front desk decorated with the Mount Cook lily (*Ranunculus lyalli*) on the lid and mountain daisy (*Celmisia* sp.) on the cupboard doors (and no Māori motifs) (Menzies 1970: 30). Two occasional tables are also in the frame, the one in the foreground with Māori designs. Another photograph (undated) of the hallway shows a side table with a tiki head near the base of the leg (Fig. 10), and an armorial chest with

a carved Māori pattern (Fig. 11).

In the blending of botanical and cultural motifs there is a conscious attempt to create not only a distinctive home, but a distinctly New Zealand hybrid form of dwelling. These motifs bring with them ideas of identity, a blend of heritages that contribute to the nation. They recall settler origins (English, Scottish and Irish), albeit with an emphasis on Menzies clan symbolism (he was addressing his son and grandchildren here), living with both the indigenous people and land (represented by flora and fauna). The motifs are brought into everyday presence, a constant reminder at the heart of daily life of where the Menzies’ were from and where they live now. In Rehutai, Menzies developed ideas he had experimented with in the small scale of individual pieces of furniture, elaborating them into a series of architectural spaces. He must have deemed Rehutai a success as he repeated the design for his replacement Menzies Bay homestead in 1907 (Menzies 1970: 94).



CARVINGS AT REHUTAI  
The drawing-room soon after the house was built in 1894.

**Figure 9.** Drawing room at Rehutai, reproduced from Menzies 1970. From left to right are the room's carved fireplace, surround and mantel, a carved drop front desk (entirely botanical in theme), a pātaka cabinet, and an occasional table that appears similar to Figure 19. In front is a carved occasional table. Above the desk is Menzies' figurative oil painting the *Grass Seeders* (Akaroa Museum accession number AK:1967.47.1). Reeded or fluted panelling lines the wall below the dado rail.



**Figure 10.** Side table associated with the Rehutai hallway. The table top is finely carved in a complex pattern. The tiki heads correspond to those carved at the base of poupou in the hall. Private collection. Photograph: D Smith



**Figure 11.** Armorial chest associated with the Rehutai hallway. The pattern is in deep relief. Private collection. Photograph: D Smith

*St Luke's Anglican Church*: A decade after Rehutai, Menzies tackled another highly ambitious project, the building of a church during 1905–1906. In the early years at Menzies Bay he had attended services at nearby Pigeon Bay where Anglican and Presbyterian services were held on alternate Sundays. A Knox church designed by Samuel Hurst Seager was built there in 1899, but by this time Menzies was attending the Little Akaloa parish, where he was a lay reader from 1893 and lay preacher from 1901 to 1914 (J Teal, Archivist, Anglican Diocese of Christchurch pers. comm. 2016).

Menzies had an evangelical upbringing and appears to have dabbled in Presbyterianism (Menzies 2003: 34, 54, 68). Eldred-Grigg (1980) records him as a Presbyterian when noting he gave land to the Church of England to build churches and vicarages in Invercargill and Riverton, a strategy, he suggests, used



**Figure 12.** Nave and chancel of St Luke's, showing part of pulpit (left) altar rail and altar, lectern right. Note the patterned edging to the floor, and the lancet windows. Photograph: D Smith, 2016

to display or establish social status (1980: 81); an interesting interpretation given that Menzies recalled the fuss made around the annual attendance of the landlord of “the whole neighbourhood” at his childhood parish church in Ringway (Menzies 2003: 45), although a spiritual dimension should not be ignored. It is worth noting Menzies paid the majority of the costs of the building of St Luke's, at least £1,000, on top of the labour he put into the project (Menzies 2004: 101). Menzies' religious leanings probably also influenced the church's decoration: there is no figurative carving anywhere in the church, showing the Low Church/Presbyterian distaste for icons in a sacred setting.

Architecturally, St Luke's is a small Gothic revival church that has been described as fitting within the Arts and Crafts movement (Fig. 12). Lochhead wrote that Menzies had forged “an amalgam of Gothic architectural forms, Māori and Celtic decorative motifs and materials from the local environment” (1996: 1). Halliday wrote that in his role as designer Menzies fitted “the Arts and Crafts ideal of the ‘thoughtful labourer’” (1996a: 6). The building does not reference Māori architecture even though the *whare karakia* (Māori church) was an established building type by the late nineteenth century. The *whare karakia* architectural model followed Māori house architecture in its design, with a central ridge pole supported by upright poles along its length, a disruptive design on a small scale (Treadwell 1991; Sundt 1999).

On the whole, Arts and Crafts architecture in New Zealand did not widely adopt Māori design. Lochhead (1999: 174) quotes the Christchurch architect Samuel Hurst Seager, from an article in the RIBA journal 1900:

*Here in New Zealand the only historical examples of Art we have are the work of the Maoris; and these, though excellent examples of savage art, are scarcely suitable as standards on which to found our national taste.*

These comments were repeated in the *Press* (Anonymous 1904), making his stance clear on

a local platform. In light of this, the decoration of St Luke's looks like a riposte writ large by Menzies to Seager. The church is Menzies' showpiece, a virtuoso performance of his carving skill and ability in architectural design.

St Luke's comprises a traditional cruciform floor plan with four sets of triple lancet windows, a belfry and a Gothic arch doorway. It was constructed from concrete made with shingle from Greendale beach (below the site), and the roof was built with locally-milled tōtara (Halliday 1996a, 1996b).

The interior of the church is lined with Oamaru stone and white Mt Somers stone was used for the carved elements. Unlike Rehutai, most of the carving in the church is in stone. The quantity of the interior decoration can, at first, be overwhelming: the pilasters are carved; the corbels and cornices are carved; the rafters are painted with kōwhaiwhai and the purlins and other roof members are painted with text including biblical quotes; a fretwork frieze in a Māori design runs the perimeter; between the

rafters are fluted rimu panels as used in Rehutai. Looking up, the roof space is a network of kōwhaiwhai and text (Fig. 13).

The church furniture utilises a range of Menzies' typical motifs. The stone pulpit is carved with reliefs of Mount Cook lily, clematis, and ferns, with Māori patterned borders, and ribbon banners with biblical quotes. The kōwhai lectern is carved in Māori patterns and inlaid with pāua shell. The stone baptismal font (Fig. 14) utilises Māori and Celtic patterns, text, and a botanical relief of nikau palm fronds around the base. The stained glass windows are also Menzies' design and reference the tukutuku lattice work found in meeting houses. (Figs 13 and 14)

St Luke's was a vehicle for Menzies to bring Māori art together with a range of other motifs into the centre of community life. Through the church he was able to give a distinctively New Zealand visual identity to the site of Christian worship. Like Rehutai, the building is developed from a blend of motifs, symbolising



**Figure 13.** Roof space, St Luke's Church, showing rafters painted with kōwhaiwhai designs in red and black. Other timbers are painted with quotations from the Bible in gold lettering. Reeded panelling is fitted between the rafters. Photograph: D Smith, 2016



that while different points of origin remain distinct, a new identity can be formed through co-mingling and combination. There are also differences to the decorative treatments of Rehutai. The use of Māori patterns is more restrained. The kōwhaiwhai patterns are more controlled and geometric than in Rehutai, fitted in neat lines within the length of each rafter. The choice of the architectural form is also a significant difference to Rehutai. The church is much more self-consciously an Arts and Crafts building with its gothic revival style, suggesting Menzies was making a more formal architectural statement in the only building he created for public use. Overall, St Luke's was not a development upon Rehutai so much as a distinct approach for a different building type.

While the building had a community purpose, it was also personal. It was the Menzies family parish church and the site



**Figure 14.** Baptismal font, St Luke's, decorated with Celtic and Māori patterns, and nikau fronds around the base. Photograph: D Smith, 2016

where Menzies family members performed as lay preachers. As well as an artistic and architectural statement, one cannot ignore the statement of social status this church made as a Menzies-sponsored building, considering his position locally as landowner and employer. There was also a memorial function. The baptismal font was dedicated to the four dead children of John and Frances Menzies, while the church bell was gifted in the memory of his uncle, Reverend Canon Frederick Menzies.

### Maori patterns painted and carved

Menzies' book *Maori Patterns* is the most accessible outcome of his creativity. The original 1910 edition was chromolithographed by Christchurch firm Smith and Anthony (Lovell-Smith 1995). According to an insert in the 1910 edition in the collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, there was an initial print run of 125 at "a price of £1 1s per set", offered with "a suitable portfolio for holding the drawings at a cost of four shillings". Binding "in any style that may be wished" was also offered, but without price options.

The original painted pattern studies are extant as a bound volume owned by a descendant. The regularity across these 28 pattern studies, their good condition, and the way the patterns are combined in each study, suggest they were produced as a discrete project rather than being a working pattern book collection. While the rich inky colours of the printing has made *Maori Patterns* a collectors' item, a comparison with the original pattern studies shows they fail to capture the subtleties of Menzies' painting, such as his allusion to carved depth and the varicoloured painting of pāua shell (*Haliotis* sp.) inserts.

The following is inscribed in Menzies' hand on the fly leaf of the volume of originals:

*This collection of Maori patterns was made by J. H. Menzies (and drawn by him) of Menzies Bay, Canterbury, N. Z., from many parts of New Zealand, Australia, British Museum – from photographs and*

*Maori houses and given to his son William Menzies – also lithographed by Messrs Smith and Antony Chch. Three copies were given to the museum Wellington and one to the Christchurch museum.*

No dates appear in connection to the studies and only one study (Menzies 1910a: 14) is annotated with source collections – the “carved boxes” from the “British Museum” and “Wellington Museum” [Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa] (Fig. 15). Research has thus far only identified one potential source object, a waka huia (treasure box) in the British Museum collection (Fig. 16) (Starzecka et al. 2010: 45, plate 57). A comparison between this object and Menzies’ painting of it (Fig. 15, top left) reveals his approach as reductionist. His rendering ignores it comprises of two parts – box and lid – and deletes the projecting wheku

heads at each end, reducing it to a pattern contained within a lozenge. This example suggests that Menzies’ approach was to extract the pattern from the object at the expense of other elements, creating a sort of idealised design.

This approach had earlier been used by the missionary Herbert Williams who collected 36 kōwhaiwhai patterns, 29 of which were published in Hamilton (1901) (Neich 1994: 29; Thomas 1995: 106). It is likely this book inspired Menzies to compile the patterns he had collected for publication. Thomas (1995: 106) has observed Williams’ reductionist approach (as opposed to the accurate reproduction of particular heke (rafters) or the whole array in a particular meeting house), regularised the designs and isolated them from their contexts, denying they had cumulative or associative



**Figure 15.** 5 carved boxes reproduced from the volume of original painted pattern studies (Menzies 1910a: 14). Top left is a British Museum wakahuia believed to be based on the wakahuia in Figure 16. Reproduced by permission from private collection.2016.

meanings in their original deployment. This criticism can equally be levelled at Menzies. Indeed the sources for his c. 125 patterns across the 28 studies are not recorded in the publication, nor are regional or iwi (tribal) origins, leaving the patterns totally dissociated from their origin. Neich's conclusion (1994: 32) was that Menzies' contribution to the study of Māori art was limited by his failure to date and record his sources. Like Williams it was an exercise in recording varieties. Menzies indicates little appreciation of individual and regional styles within Māori art, drawing freely from collections across New Zealand and overseas. It is likely he operated on the belief that the patterns in Māori art were effectively pan-tribal, consistent with the anthropology of the day (Meijl 1996: 323).

The publisher's preface to the 1975 facsimile edition stated their research pointed to an initial publication date of 1904, not 1910 as commonly believed. Unfortunately, the evidence for this finding was not presented. Disputing the date raises more than merely an antiquarian question because sitting between 1904 and 1910 are two key events: the St Luke's Church project and the entirely destructive 1907 house fire.

A 1904 publication, perhaps a short run privately financed by Menzies is not unlikely. In the *Press* (1899a) he noted he had collected "at

least sixty" patterns. Furthermore, he went on a holiday to Britain around 1900, an opportunity to see and collect photographs of taonga in the British Museum collection. Publication in 1904 would also mean the work on the painted studies was completed before the 1907 fire, and the bound copy of original studies had already been passed on to his son, hence their survival. There is also a quiet period in his chronology after 1900 prior to commencing work on St Luke's, which could have been filled with painting the studies. If the earlier date is correct, then the production of the pattern studies may have brought a new focus to his carving in St Luke's, favouring the patterns to the exclusion of carved figures. This might be an alternative to the idolatry theory proposed earlier, or at least have been another contributing factor to excluding carved figures. He had also described the "beautiful patterns" as more important than the "strange figures" in his 1899 letter.

Equally, however, newspaper coverage of the 1910 publication (including his own letter) makes no mention of an earlier printing (Anonymous 1910; Menzies 1910b). The earliest date for entries of the publication to Canterbury Museum and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa is 1910 (H Seumanutafa, Associate Curator, Canterbury Museum pers. comm. 2016; M Lewis, Liaison Librarian, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa



**Figure 16.** Wakahuia (treasure box) from the collection of the British Museum Oc1894,-.272.a. The provenance record notes it was "Bought at Hastings New Z .... Given to Dr Sonnie by Mr Stack 1832." (Starzecka et al. 2010: 45) The source could be James Stack's father. Reproduced by permission, © Trustees of the British Museum.



**Figure 17.** Firewood box with botanical surface embellishment. Private collection. Photograph: D Smith

Tongarewa pers. comm. 2016). The Macmillan Brown Library at the University of Canterbury holds a signed and dated copy from 1910 that originates from the Music and Fine Arts Collection of Canterbury College. The absence of evidence for a 1904 edition suggests the more secure date for first publication is 1910. In turn, this suggests that the painted pattern studies were made in the years 1908–1910, following the completion of the second Menzies Bay

homestead, perhaps a sort of retirement project following his period of carving.

#### **Menzies' furniture and the problem of authentication**

Carved furniture is the most numerous category of Menzies' creative output. Working within the network of the extended family as well as public museums, one descendant has



**Figure 18.** Case with hinged lid, CMA 2003.52.51. Photograph: D Smith

compiled a photo-inventory of all the furniture he could trace, although he believes more pieces are likely to be discovered. At the time of writing, the inventory remains private research; however, the author has had the opportunity to study it. During the years of compilation some furniture has changed hands leading to double entries. Once these were eliminated, a total of 76 pieces were recorded. This excludes the furniture in St Luke’s Church (pulpit, altar, altar rail, lectern, baptismal font) and the honours board carved for Christchurch Boys’ High School, but includes museum pieces. In the process of researching this essay, one new piece was positively identified (a firewood box, Fig. 17) and another identified as highly likely to be by Menzies (a case at Canterbury Museum, Fig. 18), while one thought to be by Menzies was discounted (a tray in the Canterbury Museum collection, Fig. 19).

The inventory can be broken down into the categories presented in Table 1.

There is a wide variety of furniture types and a variety of decorative approaches. Not

all pieces include Māori patterns, some have none at all. Painted Māori patterns do not on the whole appear to be used on the furniture. After Māori patterns, botanical devices are the next most common decoration, and comprise both indigenous and exotic species. Menzies carved botanical reliefs, but also used a form of monochrome surface embellishment where the outline is incised into the wood and a pigment is applied within this outline (see Fig. 17). The inventory includes some pieces carved with fauna (birds). Text in te reo Māori, English and Gaelic is used on some pieces, often in a banner ribbon. The whare whakairo form has already been discussed; another design category includes Menzies clan and Scottish national symbols. A desk with a clan narrative was displayed in Christchurch in 1899, which included a spiral Celtic pattern derived from a photograph of the Crosier of St Fillan (Menzies 1899b). A full review of Menzies’ extant furniture is beyond the scope of this essay. However, with the aim of advancing the authentication of his work, a brief examination

**Table 1.** Breakdown of furniture types for located furniture pieces

Type	Number
Trolleys and canterburys	5 (2 x canterburys)
Trays	7
Side and occasional tables	10
Screens	1
Mirror frames	2
Dinner gongs	2
Dining tables	3
Drop front desks	13 (includes 1 x davenport)
Cupboards	8 (includes 3 x pātaka style)
Cutlery canteens	3
Clock cases	2
Chests/coffers	2
Chairs	2
Stools	2
Bookcases	3
Miscellaneous household items	11



**Figure 19.** Carved tray, CMA 2010.131.1. Photograph: D Smith



**Figure 20.** Inscription, underside of an occasional table, private collection. It reads: "carved by J H Menzies / June 4th 1897 / Menzies Bay". Photograph D Smith

of the furniture in public collections will suffice so as to identify some of his main decorative themes and traits.

*Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa:* Pieces excluding Māori carving seen in isolation are not necessarily readily identifiable as Menzies' work. Without a signature or mark,

authenticating a piece of Menzies' furniture is problematic (Fig. 20). Provenance, of course, provides the most secure method of authenticating a piece, and as most furniture appears to have been made for, or inherited by descendants, the source of a piece should be traceable ultimately to a child or grandchild. As the following example indicates, comparison



**Figure 21.** “Maori folk art occasional table”. Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa ME 024019. Photograph: D Smith. A, side view of B, detail of table top.

is also a useful method. To this end the descendant’s photo-inventory is valuable. The first-hand study of a variety of Menzies’ furniture reveals consistency in the carved depth of various patterns; much is shallow-gouged to about 1 mm depth. However, this is not absolute, and aberrant examples confuse the issue. It is possible another family member has also carved pieces of furniture. William Menzies, the eldest son to reach adulthood, is known to have carved a series of seven panels with a vine motif and the legend “One Lord, One Faith” for St Saviours Church, Sydenham (Anonymous 1898a). Of course, carvers outside of the Menzies family applied Māori designs to furniture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Petersen 2000; Cottrell 2006), and it is possible some even used *Maori Patterns* (1910a) as a source book, which would encourage Menzies-like designs.

The provenance of the occasional table (Fig. 21) in the Te Papa collection has not been traced back to the Menzies family. Its acquisition came about after a New Zealander purchased the table at auction in Sydney on the merit of its carving, and brought it back into the country. The auctioneer (now deceased)

did not give any details of the table’s history to the buyer, and the buyer was not familiar with Menzies’ name or work. He passed the table on to an antique dealer in Wellington who sold it to Te Papa (M Abbot, buyer pers. comm. 2016). At the time of purchase, Te Papa staff were not aware that it was carved by Menzies, and it was recorded as a “Maori folk art occasional table”. The attribution to Menzies was applied only after a descendant saw the table on display and recognised the carving, which bears a close resemblance to a carved trolley that she had inherited (Fig. 22). Te Papa staff visited the descendant’s home to view her furniture, which all has a secure provenance, and thereafter designated the maker of the table as J H Menzies (H P, descendant pers. comm. 2016).

*Canterbury Museum:* Of the tray, case and cutlery canteen attributed to Menzies in the Canterbury Museum collection, only the canteen has a secure provenance. The latter (Fig. 23) has typical Menzies carved patterns, including the centre figure on the upper drawer that can be found in *Maori Patterns* (1910a: 12). The handles for opening the drawers are recesses worked into the carved design. It also



**Figure 22.** Trolley. Note the spiral motif on the wings and the pattern on the table top with reference to the occasional table (Fig. 21). Private collection. Photograph: D Smith **A**, side view. **B**, view of trolley table top with wings opened.

has the Menzies' pattern-cut carry handle, an upward curving void with rounded ends, seen in the top rail and the central partition inside each drawer.

The tray (Fig. 19) was purchased from a Christchurch dealer without provenance. Although displaying Menzies-like carving around the sides, it has an aberrant form of cut-out handle, which curves downwards into sharp points. The carved figures can also be questioned. The tongues on Menzies' figures are always stylised, terminating in sharp points, whereas the tongues here, although elongated, have naturalistic curves with a rounded end. Furthermore, of the seven trays recorded in the descendant's photo-inventory, all are decorated on the tray top, whereas the tray top on this example is left plain. Although the four ends of the rails that run under the tray are initialled, these are rather illegible. At least one might be construed as reading "JHM", but they could equally be other initials. Known examples where Menzies has signed a work are either on the underside (Fig. 20) or worked into a pattern in a single place. Currently there are no authenticated examples where he has placed his initials in multiple places. On balance the

attribution of this tray to Menzies is probably incorrect.

The carved case, a wide shallow box with a hinged lid (Fig. 18), on the other hand, although also currently without provenance, is very likely to be a Menzies piece. Not only are the carved patterns recognisable in other authenticated pieces of Menzies' carving, the lid is carved in a version of the cover of *Maori Patterns*, leading to the speculation that the function of the case was to house the book. The carved area of the lid is larger than the book cover and has no text. The additional surface area is filled with an elaboration of the patterns on the cover, and a figure that Menzies commonly used. An alternative speculation is that the cover of the book was based on this lid design and the case perhaps functioned as a cutlery canteen, the interior now missing its partitions. The integration of a key hole in the central figure at the front of the box is typical of other examples of Menzies' furniture.

*Akaroa Museum:* Akaroa Museum on Banks Peninsula has two provenanced examples of Menzies' furniture, a cutlery canteen and a drop-front desk. The canteen (Fig. 24), with its





**Figure 23.** Cutlery canteen, CMA 2008.61.1. Photograph D Smith

two drawers and top rail, has an identical form to the Canterbury Museum piece (Fig. 23). It also has the pattern-cut handles on the top rail and in the drawer partitions. Once again, handles to pull the drawers open are integrated into the carved design. Although faded, the top of the canteen cabinet appears to have once been decorated with a *kōwhaiwhai* design picked out in a pigment. It is unusual to see pigmented Māori patterns on Menzies' furniture, although

pigmented botanical designs are a significant subgroup of his furniture decoration, such as the wood box (Fig. 17).

The drop-front desk (Fig. 25) is a late piece, apparently made about 1918 and gifted to Reverend Henry A Wilkinson on his transfer away from the Okains Bay vicarage or Banks Peninsula East Parish (Akaroa Museum date unknown). The desk decoration is reminiscent of the pulpit at St Luke's church. The lid has a



**Figure 24.** Cutlery canteen, Akaroa Museum accession number AK:2013.15.1. Photograph D Smith



**Figure 25.** Drop-front desk, Akaroa Museum temporary identification number AK:INV:361. Photograph D Smith

deep relief of *Clematis* although its execution is laboured. A separate piece carved as a *Clematis* flower was added to the desk lid in a clumsy manner and is heavy. Lighter relief panels of Mount Cook lilies on the two cupboard doors are indistinct. Menzies suffered a stroke about 1915 (Menzies 1970: 26), which may have impaired his ability to complete this late work satisfactorily.

*Variability in quality:* Generally, across the corpus there are some pieces that are less well executed than others. While some pieces exhibit flowing pattern combinations with careful detail and accurate cutting and chiselling, other pieces appear heavy handed, and are altogether less successful.

This variability is not easily explained, especially given the difficulty in establishing a chronology of his works. However, research indicates that furniture associated with the second Menzies Bay homestead, is on the whole, less well executed. It is tentatively suggested that there was a decline in the quality of his carving after St Luke's Church was completed.

The furniture for the second Menzies Bay homestead may have been rushed, and perhaps there was an element of creative exhaustion after the execution of St Luke's. In addition, his wife Frances was ailing at this time, and may not have lived to see the replacement house completed, perhaps affecting his commitment to the project (Menzies 1970). Menzies retired to Christchurch soon after Frances died and, as asserted above, *Maori Patterns* might be seen as the bookend to his carving career.

While the problem of authentication will remain for unprovenanced furniture, establishing a secure attribution in future institutional collecting would be aided by collegial consultation between institutions. In particular, Akaroa Museum has developed a collection of resources, including photographic, which will greatly aid attribution by comparison.

### **Conclusion**

The Arts and Crafts movement casts a long shadow over the period of Menzies' artistic

activity. Menzies should be identified for his contribution to finding a New Zealand expression of this movement; he should also be regarded as an originator in his own right. The whare whakairo style was one of his innovations, an approach that can be identified in his furniture and in the architecture and decoration of Rehutai. Even at St Luke's Church, where Arts and Crafts is most purely expressed by Menzies, his reference to Māori art in its decoration combined with other motifs shows a unique and highly-developed decorative vocabulary.

Menzies' practice owed much to his research into Māori carving and painting, and his endeavour to reproduce the patterns accurately, even if they were deployed according to his own taste. His understanding of Māori art can be linked to the ethnology of several Canterbury men, while the carvings at Canterbury Museum were an early source for study. Indeed, Menzies' art should be seen as created in dialogue with the anthropology of his day; it also addressed personal and wider societal questions regarding national identity, particularly around the place of the indigenous in national life. Looking across his varied creative output there is a unity brought by the themes he addresses, chief of these, as *Maori Patterns* suggests, was his belief in the importance of Māori art to national identity; a belief that that past was relevant to his present. As art historical art documents, his work might be compared with contemporary Māori history and portrait paintings by Gottfried Lindauer and Charles Goldie, which were also informed by anthropology (Bell 1992). However, unlike these artists, Menzies was not working to please a patron. Farming provided him a secure income and, as time progressed at Menzies Bay, he would have been increasingly able to step back from day-to-day running of the farm by employing labourers and handing more responsibilities to his sons. This gave him leisure time as well as the finances for his creative pursuits.

The isolated locations of his buildings, along with the fact that much of his furniture remains

in private ownership, have not helped Menzies in becoming better recognised nationally. At the time of his death even his obituarist seemed largely oblivious to the extent of Menzies' creative endeavours. After acknowledging his work on St Luke's the writer noted that:

*Mr Menzies made a great hobby of Maori carving, and collected a vast number of patterns of native art, being, in fact, somewhat of an expert on it. His house at Menzies' Bay was full of his work, and it was unfortunate that it was destroyed by fire (Anonymous 1919).*

Since then, and in spite of the listing of his buildings and collection of his furniture by public museums, Menzies has remained a peripheral figure in our art history. Petersen (2000: 63) has complained:

*in New Zealand's standard architectural and furniture histories [a] trivialisation of the decorative arts and neglect of non-architecturally designed domestic interiors have played a part in leading art historians to underestimate the significance of early Pakeha use of Maori art in their homes.*

Given the prominence of Māori art in Menzies' practice, Petersen's comments are certainly apt. However, now his work is visible in the public realm, a thorough reappraisal is timely, one that moves beyond his definition as a hobbyist to a more critical appreciation of Menzies as an accomplished and passionate artist-craftsman.

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