



Bronte Country Estate History

Bronte Peninsula is steeped in romantic history. Its name commemorates the passionate love between British Admiral Lord Nelson, Duke Of Bronte, and Emma Hamilton, wife of Britain's Eighteenth century Ambassador to Naples.

For holding fast with 18 ships-of-the line in Naples Bay in 1799, thus ensuring his proximity to Emma and preserving the Kingdom of Naples, Nelson was rewarded by King Ferdinand with a Sicilian duchy, Bronte, and its feudal domains. Actually the duchy, represented as belonging to the crown, was sequestered church property and in a state of decay.

According to Sicilian legend, the original Bronte, one of the Cyclops, had forged the trident of Naples and thunderbolts of Jove, so the name was judged particularly suitable for the Admiral.

The New Zealand Company surveyed Bronte Village in the 1840's. The earliest maps of Nelson show only three names: Nelson, the village of Bronte, and Hampden where Murchison now stands.

Bronte Village was laid out in 20 lots, with Stafford Place (the road that runs from the shoreline to the rise) and Hamilton Street (which runs through the centre of the orchard, and is named after Emma Hamilton) dividing them. A map of Bronte hangs on the wall at the homestead.

The village was never built. Eventually all but four sections were planted in orchard; the remaining four were bought in England and never built on. When they were discovered and purchased by New Zealand owners in the 1940's it was found that the local Government was quite unaware of their existence and no rates had been paid on them for about a hundred years.

Instead of being a village, Bronte became a landing stage for the settlers in the hinterland. A road was laid and a jetty built in 1865. The jetty extended to the edge of the channel where the Lady Barkly, a little coaster, landed supplied at high tides for the German settlers in Upper Moutere.

There was no highway connecting Bronte with Motueka in those days and the eight-mile trip by sea was the quickest way to town. As the road connecting the hinterland with town improved, and the port at Mapua grew, the jetty fell into disrepair, and only a few rotten pile remains to be seen.