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Dave Veart

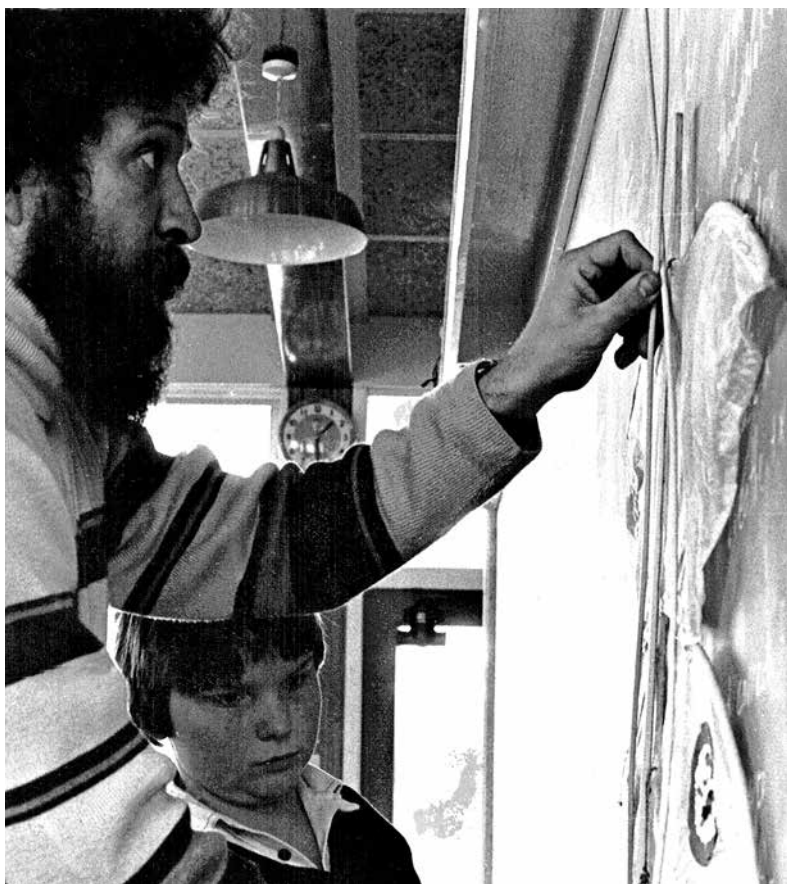
Dave thinks his generation was the ‘Saturnine generation’, a reference to the Roman god Saturn who ate his own children. *We were given a leg up and as soon as we got there, we pulled the ladder up after us.* As a result he has felt a personal obligation to pay something back to his community. Dave is a member of the Auckland Heritage Committee of the Institution of Professional Engineers and a member of Auckland Council’s Heritage Advisory Panel. He is an expert on various Auckland landmarks of historical or archaeological significance, and is well-known for his public guided walks of these areas.

Dave was born in 1950. He spent his youth in Onehunga, but feels a deep and strong bond with the Devonport community because everywhere he goes he can see something which has a family connection. *The house I live in now is the house my father grew up in, and in the Friendly Societies Hall my grandfather is recorded as the treasurer of the Ancient Order of Foresters. I still have photographs of him in full regalia.*

His father, Albert, was quite a character. *My dad had no nervous system that anyone ever detected.* He served as an engineer in the Second World War and won the Military Cross in Italy during his time as the engineer officer attached to the 28th (Māori) Battalion. After the war he worked for the Auckland Gas Company. Dave’s mother, Jean, was Australian and had been a sergeant in the Australian Army during the Second World War, when she ran a large hospital in Lae in Papua New Guinea. She was awarded a Mentioned in Dispatches (MiD)—a bronze emblem of a single oak leaf—and had *a row of medals about as long as my father’s.*

At home Dave was a voracious reader. *I was brought up surrounded by my mother’s stories and my father’s book collection, which was focused on early New Zealand missionaries and the New Zealand Wars. When I was about six I thought, ‘If I read every book in the Onehunga Library I will know everything there is to know.’ It didn’t take long to work out that this was impossible.* Until recently, Dave would read five books a week. *My mother was incredibly interested in history and my father was totally self-taught which, when I was an adolescent, used to embarrass me because he would use words that he didn’t know how to pronounce, which he wouldn’t give a stuff about. He just used them anyway!*

By the age of 12, Dave had decided that he wanted to be an archaeologist, but his parents encouraged him to attend Auckland University and study law. Dave did the usual student thing and went flatting. He lived in Ponsonby, which in the 1970s was a thriving inner-city creative community, a hub of activism, and had a mixed population of Māori, Pākehā and Pacific Islanders.



Dave's teaching days, running a kite making class, circa 1978

This was a time of protest over Māori rights, equal rights for women and gay liberation. Dave recalls that the Māori rights group, Ngā Tamatoa, was founded in the living room of his flat. Ngā Tamatoa was at the forefront of a protest movement calling for the Government to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi. *My parents were also very anti-racist and non-judgmental about homosexuals. I have no idea how my parents ended up as liberals but my father, because he had been associated with the Māori Battalion, had a very positive attitude towards Māori and my mother, who had worked with people in Papua New Guinea, really loved them so their experiences of non-Europeans were very positive, and they brought*

us up that way. One of my uncles had been involved in the 1960 'No Māori's No Tour' movement.

In 1975 Dave graduated with a Bachelor of Laws, but he has never practised. After working at a variety of short-term jobs, he decided to enrol at Auckland Teachers' College in 1976, where he trained as a primary school teacher before teaching in Otara.

When Dave and his wife, Sarah, returned to New Zealand from working in England in 1980, they settled in Devonport. In fact, they bought the house in which Dave's father had lived in as a child. *I went and bought back the house my father had grown up in which meant that my kids and him shared a whole lot of experiences; they both went to Vauxhall Primary. And in fact my dad and my children both went together to the 75th jubilee, I think it was, of Vauxhall Primary so there is a whole lot of connections which were quite nice.*

Dave then became involved in various national protests and community activities. He arrived in Devonport at the tail end of years of local community campaigns to save Ngataranga Bay from development. *There had been a fine imposed to be paid to the developers who had lost the right to develop and it was paid for largely by sausage sizzles. I remember I'd only been back for a matter of a couple of weeks, when a friend said 'Bring your knives; we are making a thousand kebabs' and we did a barbecue down by the cricket club to raise money and so all the fine was paid off.*

He then actively participated in the 1981 protests against the Springbok rugby tour, and in the anti-nuclear movement. He joined the Peace Squadron, a group of boaties, surfers and owners of dinghies that protested the visits of potentially nuclear-armed United States warships and submarines to New Zealand ports. In 1981, his home of Devonport was the first borough in New Zealand to declare itself nuclear-free.

Dave went back to university to fulfil his childhood dream and studied archaeology, anthropology and history. After graduating he worked for the New Zealand Historic Places Trust (now Pouhere Taonga Heritage New Zealand) in the archaeological unit based



Dave at an archaeological excavation in the Bay of Islands, early 1980s

in Auckland. His primary fieldwork was in South Auckland and focused on Māori food production systems and gardening in volcanic parts of Auckland. His first and best-selling book, *First Catch Your Weka: A History of New Zealand Cookery*, grew out of that fieldwork.

Another of his early jobs was to investigate whether or not the first two aircraft built by Boeing had been buried, surrounded by unexploded ammunition, in secret tunnels under North Head in Devonport. After its establishment in 1987, the Department of Conservation (DOC) had taken over the management of North Head and had ruled that any hunt for the Boeing aircraft had to be done by an archaeologist to prevent further damage to the maunga (mountain).

DOC commissioned Dave to do the work and the project took two years. *This is when I really plugged into the Devonport community, says Dave. I was put in charge of that pivotal project which involved large amounts of community consultation. We had meetings at the Devonport Yacht Club packed to the gunwales [the top edge of the side of a boat] with concerned residents. We did oral history interviews, we did a huge amount of research, thousands of hours. Found a whole lot of history which had largely been forgotten. At the end of the day my conclusion was that this is just a story. There were no explosives in the tunnels. We didn't find anything and there is nothing to find. It's a story, an extremely good story and that is sadly all it is.* The Devonport community was *mostly happy* with his conclusions but some people would still to this day really like the story to be true.

The Department of Conservation then employed Dave full time as their archaeologist historian. Another project he vividly recalls was Fort Takapuna, between Narrow Neck and Cheltenham beaches. The government of the day had produced a review of Fort Takapuna, which found that it was surplus to Defence Force requirements, and decided to sell it. The residents of Devonport objected and took the Crown to court; they won and the area was

made part of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park in 2000. Dave then worked with Jim Henry to turn the area into a reserve. *It was the best two years of my working career, it was wonderful. It was sort of applied history. The practicalities of working with the community. We did lots of community consultation on what was to be retained.* Dave also made many presentations to local councils. *Luckily North Shore City came on board because DOC had run out of money at that stage.*

In 2004, he encouraged use of Fort Takapuna historic reserve as a venue for the biennial Sculpture on the Shore exhibitions organised by Friends of the Women's Refuge Trust (FoWRT). *That was the reserve coming to life.*

Dave has also been involved in film making. He worked on the screenplay for *Maungauika: The Story of a Mountain about the history of North Head. It is me doing the voiceover.* The film still screens today in the stone kitchen theatre on the western side of the summit. Dave estimates that 500 to 800 people see it every week. The refurbished fire command post on the eastern side of the barracks building at the summit plays a film about the restoration of Rangitoto and Motutapu islands and the historic fire command post regularly screens *Armed. Ready. And waiting*, a film about Auckland's impressive Second World War defence network, which was controlled from that very building.

He has also worked with Devonport resident, Chris Keenan, on *The Guns of Motutapu* about Auckland's coastal defences, which was shown at the Auckland Museum on Anzac Day in 2006. In 2011, he published a book entitled *Digging up the Past: Archaeology for the Young and Curious*. Dave is keen to encourage young people to consider archaeology as a career.

Dave continues to work closely with the Devonport Heritage group, Auckland Council's Heritage Advisory Panel and Devonport Museum, and is the current chairperson of the Peninsula Trust. *I originally was the DOC representative and I just stayed on.* The Peninsula Trust employs a community coordinator,



The levers of power are now so removed from the community's hands.

supports local community events in Devonport, and is a source of local information and support for newcomers or ‘old timers’ in Devonport. *I think the Trust’s strengths are that it has got trustees who are pretty much embedded in the local community.* Dave thinks that there are geographic reasons for the very strong sense of community in Devonport. *Devonport is one of the few Auckland suburbs that actually has edges to it because of its location on a peninsula.*

Although he says he tries to fight nostalgia, he notes that *in the past everything was done very locally, which was why the local people could stop the Ngataringa Bay marina and reclamation development. It was stopped by the direct action of voting out the previous council. We couldn’t do that nowadays because you have to vote out the whole Auckland Council.*

Dave feels that today it is harder for communities to operate at a level beyond the very basic in order to get the sorts of things they want because *the levers of power are now so removed from the community’s hands.* He does feel that his work at the grassroots level, along with others in the community, helps to *keep the community ticking over. But I think the fact that it needs to be assisted suggests to me that the old systems are not working.*

Select Bibliography For Dave Veart

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