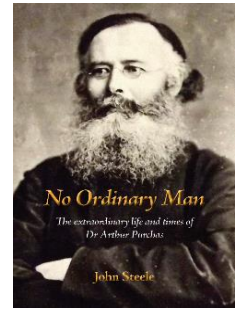


No Ordinary Man

Rev Dr Arthur Purchas

*One of Onehunga's most prominent 'founders'
and first vicar of St Peter's*



No Ordinary Man is the title of a historical biography by *John Steele*, first published in 2019, detailing the life and times of Arthur Purchas, a man regarded as one of the most extraordinarily talented pioneers of New Zealand's 19th century.

He has been described as a polymath - one of our most courageous and skilled doctors and surgeons but also the designer and founder of St Peter's, Onehunga. He was also a skilled engineer, geologist, horticulturist, botanist, explorer, priest, artist, linguist and musician and someone who played a pivotal role in the establishment of Auckland's most prominent cultural and educational institutions.

The book tells the Arthur Purchas story in three parts. The First Part (the '*Selwyn Years*') covers his arrival in Onehunga in 1847 and his sometimes problematic relationship with George Selwyn. It details the stipendiary issues and early missionary tensions, the start of education and the opening in Onehunga of probably New Zealand's first public library, plus the Purchas architectural legacy and his role in designing several of the "*Selwyn churches*", including St Peter's. Five of those churches are still in use today, several with Heritage NZ accreditation. It describes the role Purchas played with Frederic von Hochstetter in the first geological mapping of Auckland and the North Is, as well as his introduction to and relationship with the founders of the Maori Kingitanga and the first Maori king, Te Wherowhero.

Part One also describes the many other activities Purchas either initiated or was involved in - the first European discoveries of the Huntly and Drury coal fields, the promotion of Auckland's water supply and his role as first guardian of Auckland's public health. It also covers Purchas's pioneering medical and surgical activities – participation at New Zealand's first caesarean birth in Onehunga, introduction of a revolutionary new treatment for typhoid, and his activities as Auckland's most prominent trauma and emergency specialist while resident surgeon at Auckland's first hospital.

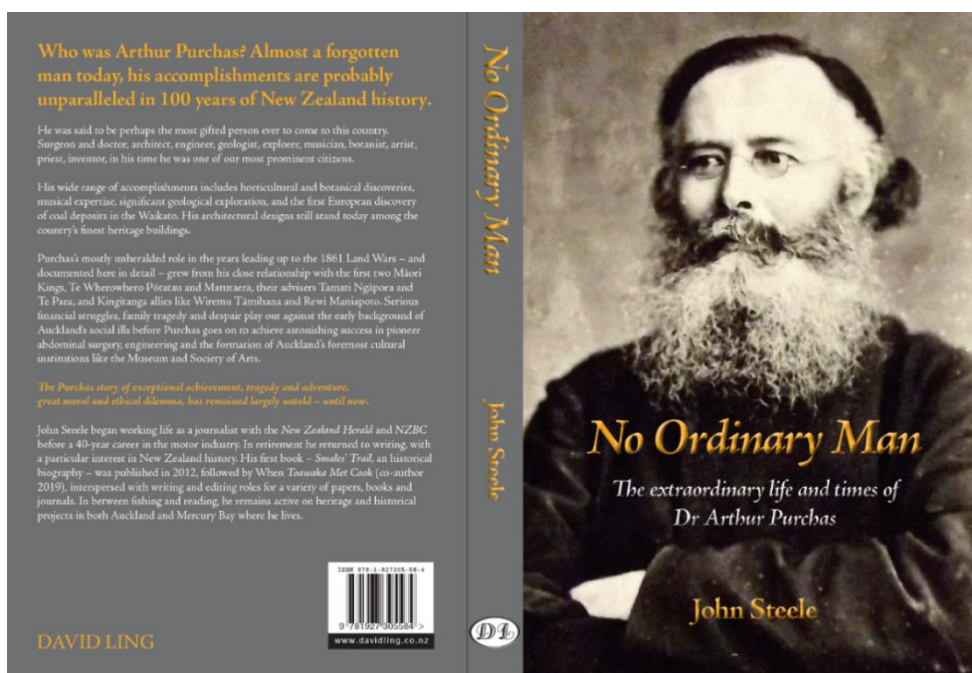
Part Two (the '*War Years*') describes Purchas's activities during the build-up to the Land Wars of the early 1860s in the Waikato and Taranaki and his close relationship with Kingitanga leaders. It begins with the decline in Maori-Pakeha relationships, the genesis of the King movement and Purchas's intimate connection with Ngati Mahuta leaders, Te Wherowhero, Ngapora, Matutaera, Te Paea and Ngati Haua's Wiremu Tamihana among others. The story details specific events involving Purchas (1859-63) while he was medical commissioner in Otawhau - Te Awamutu during the final days before the eventual outbreak of war in July 1863. Here Purchas acted as an intermediary and communications link between the Kingitanga leaders and Governors Browne and Grey as the situation escalated. It was also about this time that Purchas' skill as an artist came to the fore. Samples of his art from this time - brilliantly executed line drawings and sketches of people and surroundings – are published for the first time in *No Ordinary Man*. This section also covers his on-going building and design projects, such as the first Mangere Bridge, his revolutionary flax machine - awarded New Zealand's very first patent - and the two animal species he discovered and which are named after him.

Part Three traces in more detail the Purchas '*Medical Years*' from the time the on-going stipendiary problems forced him to leave the ministry and take up full-time medical practice to provide for his large family. Unable to be adequately provided for by Selwyn's church, Purchas left Onehunga (1875) and set up medical practice from new homes in Karangahape Rd, and later Pitt St. He became a pioneer in advanced abdominal surgery, using revolutionary techniques and treatments with outstanding success. He was one of the first to adopt Joseph Lister's new antiseptic measures, immediately establishing a reputation as one of the colony's most skilled medical men. Previously unpublished medical notes detail this surgical skill and treatment, including his use of 'carbolic putty' to seal and sterilise wounds together with new suturing and stitching techniques. He led the foundation of the Society of Arts and the Choral Society. He was asked to produce the first NZ Hymnal, contributing several of his own

compositions in the process. He was one of the most prominent founding members, 3 times president and lifetime member of the Auckland Institute, the forerunner of today's Auckland Museum. Through the 1870-90s, Purchas was one of Auckland's most recognisable and respected citizens. A passionate interest in public transport led to him investing in a new land and public transport company at the height of the Auckland 1880s commercial "boom". He built a three-storied building, still standing today, in the heart of Auckland's then main retail centre, Karangahape Rd. His fortunes were hit hard in the subsequent "bust" and depression of the late 1880s and early 1890s but Purchas survived and went to live in Epsom, where he continued his medical practice into old age. For 25 years he served as medical officer for the Government's Howe St home, looking after 700-800 orphaned, destitute or crippled children while also helping to establish the Blind Institute in Parnell where he also played crucial roles.

Arthur Purchas' story is one of unbelievable accomplishment, dedication and talent, written within the context of early Auckland social and cultural life, the settler-Maori tensions leading to the historic land troubles and conflict, and fascinating recount of pioneer medical treatment and surgery.

The book offers the proposition that in view of the astonishing legacy left by Purchas in so many areas of arts and culture, science and education, architecture, engineering and medicine – he should be reassessed in terms of his contribution, not only to Onehunga and Auckland history but also New Zealand's colonial past.



The book, ***No Ordinary Man*** – published by David Ling Publishing Ltd, is available at all good book stores (\$39.95) or by contacting the author jgsteel@xtra.co.nz.