

Blomfield's Terraces

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*The number of this painter's works are undoubted proof of his industry.*¹

*"Blomfield in Wonderland" should not become a proverb.*²

The replicas Charles Blomfield produced of his famous terrace paintings have no real parallel in New Zealand art. Blomfield kept a manuscript book of 'Picture Sales', covering the early part of his career, in which he recorded transactions involving more than 200 terrace pictures in the decade before 1892.³ Blomfield continued to paint the terraces throughout his career, and a huge canvas of Rotomahana stood unfinished on his easel when he died in 1926.⁴ What is the meaning of this vast chain of cloned pictures? How did it all begin? And what was its significance for Blomfield's career?

He first visited the world-renowned pink and white terraces during a camping trip in the summer of 1875-76. Blomfield and his friend Thomas Spurgeon camped at Rotomahana ('all by ourselves on the spot so many have come thousands of miles to see') from New Year's Eve until 3 January, and left amid accusations of trespass and vandalism from the Tuhourangi of nearby Te Wairoa.⁵ Although tourists in 1876 were still being encouraged to make indelible inscriptions on the very surface of the terraces, the appropriation of specimens of silica formation had finally been forbidden, as had visitors without Maori guides. Blomfield's journal does not refer directly to painting, an habitual activity, but the several terrace pictures he records selling before 1883 must be based on sketches he made during this visit.

He returned with his wife early in 1883, when he made the sketches on which he based the Rotomahana canvases exhibited with the Society of Arts in April 1883. Particularly acclaimed were two large pictures now in a private Auckland collection, showing tourists and Maori guides visiting both terraces. During 1884, Blomfield made arrangements to return to Rotomahana for an extended painting trip. Remembering the trouble of 1876, he negotiated rights to camp and paint through Te Wairoa schoolteacher and friend Charles Haszard. The *Auckland Weekly News* reported on these negotiations:

The Maoris are a very conservative people concerning their customs and privileges, but one by one these customs and privileges, sometimes very obstructive