

Dalmatian settlement and identity in New Zealand: the Devcich Farm, Kauaeranga Valley, near Thames

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This paper looks at issues of identity surrounding the settlement of Dalmatian migrants in New Zealand in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Dalmatian migration to this country was part of a global phenomenon as many young Dalmatian men sought short-term work in the New World in response to social and economic pressures at home. Specific experiences in their new environments often helped to shape new identities, especially for migrants who decided to settle permanently. The current paper examines the physical composition of a farmstead belonging to one group of settlers at the Devcich Farm, near Thames, and how it might reflect both an on-going sense of identity linked with cultural origins in Dalmatia, and changing identity acquired through social interaction and other experiences in New Zealand. The investigation has a particular emphasis on evidence from standing structures and plantings on the site, and is assisted by documentary information that provides specific historical context.

INTRODUCTION

In 2004, Ian Smith published an article which looked at potential future directions for historical archaeology in New Zealand (Smith 2004). Smith proposed that the discipline was a long way from realising its potential in this country, and that one of the ways in which it could better inform growing public interest in New Zealand's past was to explore and tease out the identities of the diverse groups that make up current society. As he argued:

Questions of identity are of critical importance in early 21st century New Zealand. They are one of the key drivers in public policy, and are at the cutting edge of current political debate. They see expression in art, literature, music and sport, as well as scholarly writing. They range in scope from local perceptions of community identity, through concerns for tightly circumscribed but spatially dispersed groups such as specific iwi, Pacific Island immigrants or Croatian women, to broad issues such as Māori, Pākehā or national identity. At least some of these are issues to which the unique perspective of historical archaeology could make a positive contribution (Smith 2004:261).

Central to Smith's proposition is the notion of identity. Identity is generally defined by perspectives of difference and similarity to others. It can apply at an individual or a group level, but in a collective context can be understood as individuals' identification with broader collections of people according to differences that are socially sanctioned as significant (Díaz-Andreu and Lucy 2005:1). Resultant identities are frequently complex, in part because they potentially encapsulate intersections between a variety of influences which may be related to issues of ethnic or national origin, gender, status or class, religion, sexual orientation, occupation and other factors (Božić-Vrbančić 2008:153-155; Smith 2004:261). They can also be fluid and subject to change as people, or peoples, negotiate their way within broader society (Smith 2004:261).

Expressions of identity take many forms, and include physical manifestations that are recoverable through archaeological investigation. Research can encompass not only excavated material – which forms the main focus for Smith's article – but other evidence of past human activity such as standing structures and surviving plantings.

Standing structures, for example, can reveal information about identity through their architectural style, construction

methods and materials, spatial organisation, décor and functional use. Employment of each of these aspects is subject to social influence that can include a desire to express similarity to, or difference from, others. Overseas, buildings have formed a significant focus in examinations of identity, such as strands linked with 'Britishness' during the early modern period (Lawrence 2003) and expressions of identity connected with religious activity (Díaz-Andreu and Lucy 2005:8). In the USA, analyses of Polish workers' housing in Milwaukee (Hubka and Kenny 2000) and synagogues in Georgia (Moffson 2003) have been used to explore the relationship between migrant groups and 'Americanisation' in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Equally, in relation to plantings it has been argued that some plants played a significant role in the early development of notions of territoriality. Their use for particular food production and consumption also potentially emphasises concepts of communal similarity and difference (Hastorf 1998:779-780; Lucy 2005:105). Buildings and plants can not only reflect identity but also shape its development. Within the context of historical archaeology, investigations of physical material can test, expand on and modify discourses obtained from similarly detailed examinations of the documentary record to create a more nuanced perspective of identities and their trajectories.

The current paper seeks to take up Smith's challenge for the discipline by considering how the visible remnants of one particular site – the Devcich Farm in the Kauaeranga Valley, near Thames – illuminates issues of identity linked with the settlement in New Zealand of migrants from Dalmatia. The Devcich Farm was registered by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust Pouhere Taonga in 2011 (Jones 2011). The current paper draws on this work, and on the more detailed archaeological recording of one of the standing buildings that has since been carried out. It examines how the physical composition of the main farmstead at the heart of the farm – including its buildings and plantings – might reflect Dalmatian origins and perhaps an on-going sense of identity linked with cultural roots in Dalmatia. It also investigates whether the farmstead might reflect changing identity gained through social interaction and other experiences in New Zealand.

DALMATIAN MIGRATION TO NEW ZEALAND

The term 'Dalmatian' is used to refer to individuals who originate from a particular region in Croatia known

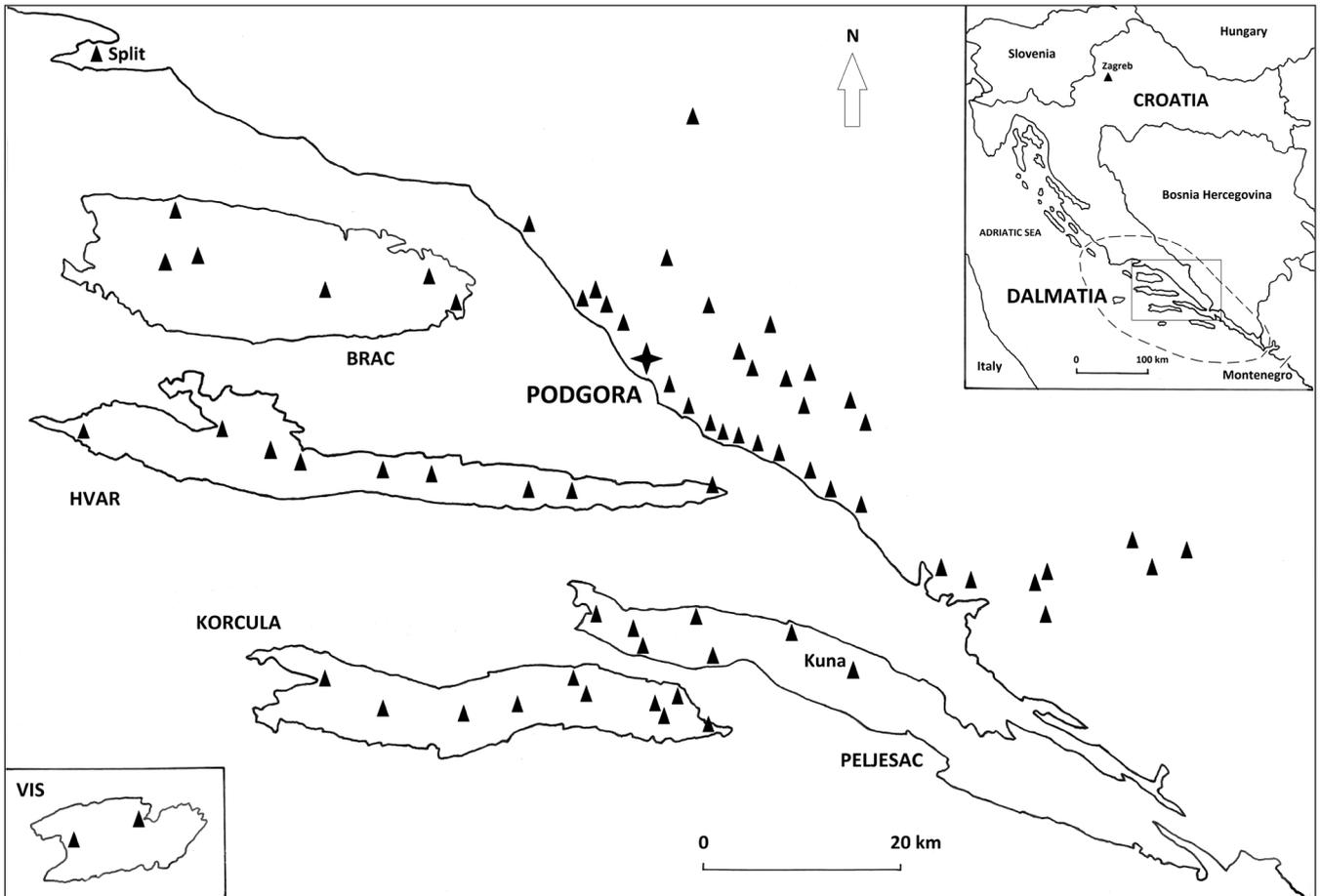


Figure 1: Location of Dalmatia, and the main birthplaces of Dalmatian chain migrants (after Trlin 1979:30).

historically as Dalmatia (Figure 1). Dalmatia has been predominantly inhabited by South Slavic peoples and notably those of Croat ethnicity since the sixth and seventh centuries AD (Violich 1998:82-83). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was dominated by a succession of European powers, and formed part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire between 1867 and 1918 (Trlin 1979:11-13).

Widespread emigration from Dalmatia to the New World occurred during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as a result of social and economic pressures. At this time, the region incorporated a largely peasant society which was almost completely committed to subsistence agriculture, and traditionally based on a system of extended family cooperation known as the *zadruga*. As a province of Austria, Dalmatia was subjected to heavy taxes, monopolies on trade routes and strict military conscription. Austrian inheritance laws led to agricultural holdings diminishing in size, making them less viable. Additionally, between the 1880s and 1901, vine disease affected the winemaking industry – a major feature of Dalmatian life. Further to these hardships, an increasing breakdown in the *zadruga* system fuelled a desire in many peasant families for self-sufficiency and independent landholder status, for which income from overseas or the overseas purchase of land offered a solution. Emigration was particularly high between 1890 and 1914, including to destinations such as the Americas and Australia (Trlin 1979:6-9, 16-19, 41; Božić-Vrbančić 2008:54-58). Significant numbers of Dalmatians arrived in New Zealand from the early 1890s, although some earlier settlers are recorded from the 1860s onwards (Trlin 1979:26-40).

Dalmatian migration to New Zealand exhibited three distinctive characteristics. First, most migrants were drawn from a comparatively restricted geographical area in central

Dalmatia (Trlin 1979:28-32) (Figure 1). Second, there was an emphasis on temporary emigration by single young men, frequently involving ‘chain’ migration whereby members of the same family or group went to join relatives who were already established in New Zealand (Božić-Vrbančić 2008:60-62; Trlin 1979:41). Third, many gained a living by digging for kauri gum when they first arrived in the country (Trlin 1979:60). The new arrivals generally undertook this hard physical labour collectively in gangs, often initially living and working with men from the same village as themselves (Božić-Vrbančić 2008:140; Trlin 1979:69, 73). According to Božić-Vrbančić (2008:138-140), many migrants consequently retained identities linked with individual village communities in Dalmatia. However, a greater sense of collective identity eventually developed as a result of shared interaction and connections, possibly assisted by a concentration of migrants in the northern part of New Zealand, where the gum fields were located. By 1921, more than 90 per cent of 1585 recorded immigrants of Dalmatian or other ‘Yugoslav’ origin in New Zealand lived north of the Bay of Plenty (Trlin 1979:135).

A shared sense of Dalmatian identity was also forged in the face of a dominant culture in New Zealand that was endeavouring to create a sense of nationhood, based on an idea of cultural homogeneity within which people of Dalmatian origin did not comfortably fit (Božić-Vrbančić 2008:64, 140). Brooking and Rabel (1995:23) have noted that New Zealand was viewed by its successive governments as ‘a Utopia for the chosen few; preferably white, Protestant Britons’. Belich (2001:53-86, 121-125) has also argued that from the 1880s, a process of ‘recolonisation’ took place which emphasised a collective identity based on the notion of a ‘Better Britain’ to assist with economic and other imperial goals. Migrants from

Dalmatia, along with other groups such as Lebanese and Chinese settlers, faced suspicion and legal discrimination stemming from their cultural difference and divergence from the 'desirable coloniser' stereotype of the time (Božić-Vrbančić, 2008:68-75; Brooking and Rabel 1995:28). In 1898, for example, the Kauri Gum Industry Act reduced the number of Dalmatian migrants on the gum fields and reserved large areas of Crown land for workers of British extraction. Further restrictions on Dalmatian activity in the gum fields were introduced in 1908 and 1910 to protect the British gum digger (Božić-Vrbančić, 2008:73; Trlin 1979:53-54). Fears and associated intolerance increased after the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914, when Dalmatians were classified as 'enemy aliens' (Božić-Vrbančić 2008:78-79). In the 1920s, official attempts to limit immigration included a quota of 3500 people, 'after which only the wives, fiancées, and children of minor age of Dalmatians already in New Zealand would be permitted entry' (Brooking and Rabel 1995:29). A consequence of this policy was an increase in the proportion of female migrants from just three per cent before 1920 to 34 per cent in the period from 1920 to 1939 (Trlin 1979:47).

Migration from Dalmatia may originally have been intended as a temporary measure, but between 1899 and 1916, a growing number of Dalmatians decided to settle permanently. Savings obtained on the gum fields were often used to purchase marginal land, which could be improved through dedicated labour and by using traditional skills in viticulture, fruit-growing and general farming. Additional income, however, was often required, meaning that settlement was frequently seen as a gradual process. In 1916, some 16 per cent of migrants from Dalmatia and the broader region – or just under 300 individuals – recorded in a Register of Aliens were involved in agriculture (Trlin 1979:68), suggesting a still relatively limited number of farms. Such farms were typically created in the midst of areas occupied by mobile temporary immigrants engaged in gum digging, who still formed the majority of the Dalmatian population (Trlin 1979:81).

As gum digging declined from the 1930s, additional numbers of Dalmatians took up agriculture or moved to large urban centres such as Auckland to undertake other work (Božić-Vrbančić 2008:142; Trlin 1979:134-135). Immigration policy remained restrictive until the 1950s, although on-going chain migration and other factors contributed to a regular net increase in the number of permanent migrants entering New Zealand from Dalmatia until at least the 1970s (Brooking and Rabel 1995:29; Trlin 1979:26-29). By the early 1970s, Dalmatian-born individuals formed a major part of the second-largest group of residents from mainland Europe – officially defined as 'Yugoslavs' (Trlin 1979:28).

THE DEVCICH FAMILY AND FARM

According to family tradition and official records, the Devcich family originated from Podgora on the Dalmatian coast (AEC 1916:7; Berry 2007:72) (Figure 1). The historical nucleus of this small area of settlement is an old-established village known as Gornja Podgora. In the early twentieth century it consisted of a cluster of houses built, according to one account, almost entirely from stone, 'even the roofs' (M. Milich, in Božić-Vrbančić 2008:56). The same source refers to small pockets of cultivable land and the devastating effects of the grape plague on its previously profitable vineyards. In the period 1890-1939, Podgora provided the largest number of naturalised Dalmatian migrants to New Zealand, constituting nearly 12 per cent of total arrivals, or some 300 people (Trlin 1979:31).

Emigration by members of the Devcich family conformed to the pattern of chain migration by single young men.

Between the late 1890s and early 1900s, three brothers left for New Zealand, taking up work in the northern North Island in areas where fellow Dalmatians had also settled. The eldest brother, Marian Anton Devcich, left Podgora in 1897 at the age of 17 (AEC 1916:7), finding work in the gum fields on the Coromandel Peninsula (Jelicich n.d.) in a district that contained the second highest number of Dalmatians in the colony by 1901 (Trlin 1979:63). In 1903, he was joined by his brother Simun, who initially worked at Gumtown – now Coroglen – where over 100 Dalmatians are said to have been living. A third brother, Nikola Devcich, arrived in New Zealand in 1905 (AEC 1916:13).

In the early 1900s, the brothers moved from being gum diggers to traders and landowners, indicating a decision to settle permanently. This occurred following Marian Anton's return from overseas in 1907 or 1908, his having been back to Dalmatia and conscripted into the Austrian navy. Setting up business as the Devcich Brothers, the family opened a store at Puriri and ran packhorses to the gum digging camps, providing supplies to the workmen and buying gum from them for the return journey. Land was purchased at Puriri and subsequently Hikutaia, on which cattle and dairy cows were kept (AEC 1916:3-8; Devcich Brothers 1918b; Jelicich n.d.).

The shift to landowning was accompanied by other changes in the Devcich family. In 1908 Simun Devcich became a naturalised citizen, followed by his brother Nikola in 1914 (*Thames Star* 19 December 1919:2). The two elder brothers also married: Marian Anton to Antonia Lovrich in 1910, and Simun to Matija Mercep in 1913 (BDM 1910, 1913). It was uncommon for Dalmatian men in New Zealand to marry Dalmatian women at this time: out of 1332 estimated permanent arrivals from regions within the former Yugoslavia in 1910-1914, only 82 were female (Trlin 1979:27). Marriage often accompanied a decision by male migrants to settle permanently in the country (Trlin 1979:47).

In 1915, Marian Anton, Simun and Nikola Devcich collectively purchased the 250 ha Kahe Block in the upper Kauaeranga Valley – a locality that had been an important source of kauri for Auckland's timber trade since the 1870s (PR8/3) (Figure 2). Significantly larger than later Dalmatian holdings in some other areas (Trlin 1979:83), the property incorporated both flat ground beside the Kauaeranga River and hilly terrain to the east. It had been previously owned by a Portuguese sheep farmer, Joze Machado (PR 8/3; *Thames Star* 3 May 1913:1). In 1913, the property was described as being mostly in grass, and having a four-roomed house and a woolshed (*Thames Star* 11 October 1913:1). It is not clear what happened to these structures after the Devcich family took over.

The Devcich brothers purchased the Kahe Block at a time when the Kauri Timber Company (KTC), sought to improve the efficiency of its tree-felling operations in the Kauaeranga by constructing a tramline from the valley mouth to large stands of kauri at the head of the valley (Berry 2007:111; *Thames Star* 19 June 1913:4). The brothers received a mortgage from the KTC at the time of their purchase, and simultaneously granted the company certain timber rights and the ability to construct a tramline through their land (PR 8/3). Until the tramway was finished in 1920 (Hayward 1978:42), the brothers ran shorthorn steers on the property (Devcich Brothers 1918a). According to one source, a nikau whare provided accommodation at the farmstead during this period (Rand 1997:3).

Around the time of their land purchase the Devcich brothers directly experienced suspicion and intolerance towards Dalmatians. This can be attributed to heightened tensions as a result of World War I and was perhaps exacerbated by their status as traders and landowners. In 1916,

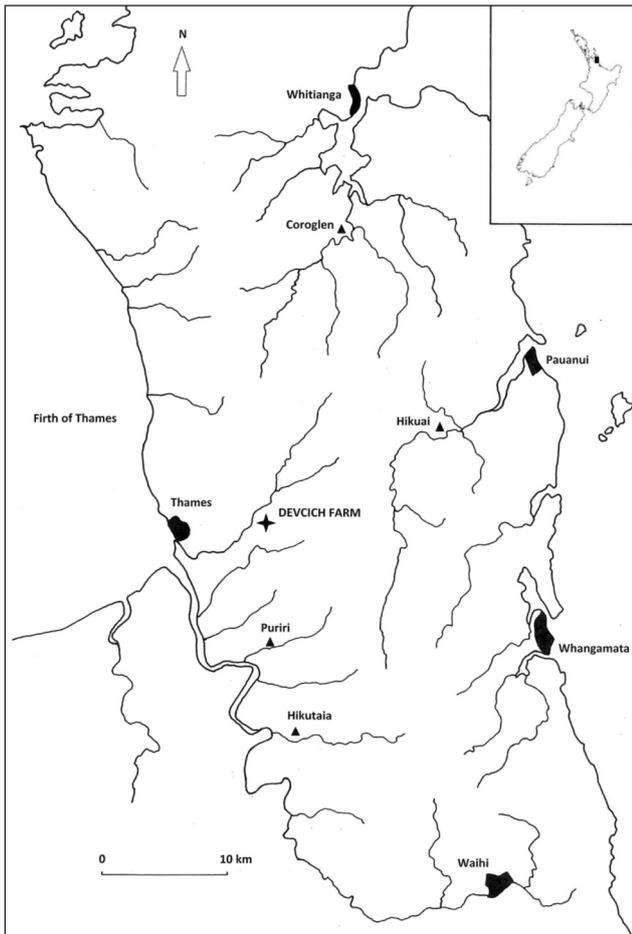


Figure 2: Location of the Devcich Farm, on the Kahe Block in the Coromandel Peninsula.

Marian Anton was briefly interned on Somes Island after being considered a threat by the Alien Enemies' Commission due, in part, to his 'good position' and potential influence in the Dalmatian community (AEC 1916). Both Simun and Nikola Devcich were also physically assaulted at the Hikutaia saleyards in 1919, for reasons that may have included their ownership of land: one of their assailants, a wounded war veteran, is said to have stated during the assault that they had 'the pick of the land I'm looking for' (*Thames Star* 20 December 1919:2).

Permanent family occupation of the farm appears to have occurred from 1920, when Simun and Matija Devcich moved to the farmstead with six children, aged six and under (Berry 2007:74-75). After Marian Devcich's name was formally removed from the legal title in 1922 (CT SA322/160), Nikola and his wife Ruze Devcich are said to have also moved to the property (Rand 1997:3). The family set about improving the land by felling trees, clearing bush and sowing grass seed by hand. By the late 1920s, they had a dairy herd of 63 cows (Berry 2007:75). As well as domestic dwellings, timber farm buildings were erected around a farmyard alongside the KTC tramline (Rand 1997:3-4). These were mostly built in the 1920s and 1930s.

Income from the farm was supplemented through trading and other

activities. After closure of the tramline in 1927-1928 (Hayward 1978:frontispiece), the Devcich brothers regularly transported supplies by packhorse to gum diggers, who had replaced KTC timber workers in bush camps further up the valley. Many were fellow Dalmatians, and the Devcich Farm became a focal point for supplying such individuals from a farm store. A credit system operated, whereby diggers paid for supplies when they provided gum from the workings (Rand 1997:6-7). Other farm-based activities at this time included timber milling and wine production, which were undertaken commercially as well as for family use (Rand 1997:5, 8). Agricultural activities also continued. Shortly after gum digging declined in the mid-1930s, Nikola and Simun Devcich had sufficient pasture to run 55 milking cows, 60 heifers, 5 steers, 7 bulls, 16 horses, 25 ewes, 210 hoggets and 20 pigs (Berry 2007:44). In 1939, Simun Devcich became the sole owner after Nikola's share of the property was transferred to him (CT SA487/111).

By the start of the 1940s, the Devcich family had become established members of the local community. Several of Simun and Matija Devcich's children had formed a band that played at nearby dances (Berry 2007:76), and Simun Devcich became active in the local horseracing scene (Williams 1987:162-4).

During the 1940s and 1950s, the focus of the farm shifted to sheep management (Rand 1997: 9). By 1953, a woolshed had been added at the northern end of the farmyard (Anon. n.d.), and by the 1970s the herd had grown to 2300 head (Berry 2007:75). In 1964, the farm had been passed on to Sam and Stan Devcich, the eldest and youngest sons of Simun and Matija Devcich, although the latter lived on the farm until their deaths in 1971 and 1977 respectively (CT SA487/111). The property was occupied by Sam Devcich until 2008 and remains in family hands today.

THE SITE

Considerable remnants of the main farmstead and its associated historical landscape survive. The farmstead is located in the southern part of the farm, on a flat terrace overlooking the Kauaeranga River. It comprises a collection of timber, concrete and corrugated iron buildings, many of which are arranged around an irregularly-shaped farmyard (Figure 3). A pair of closely-spaced dwellings at the entrance to the complex consist of a two-roomed cottage and a larger

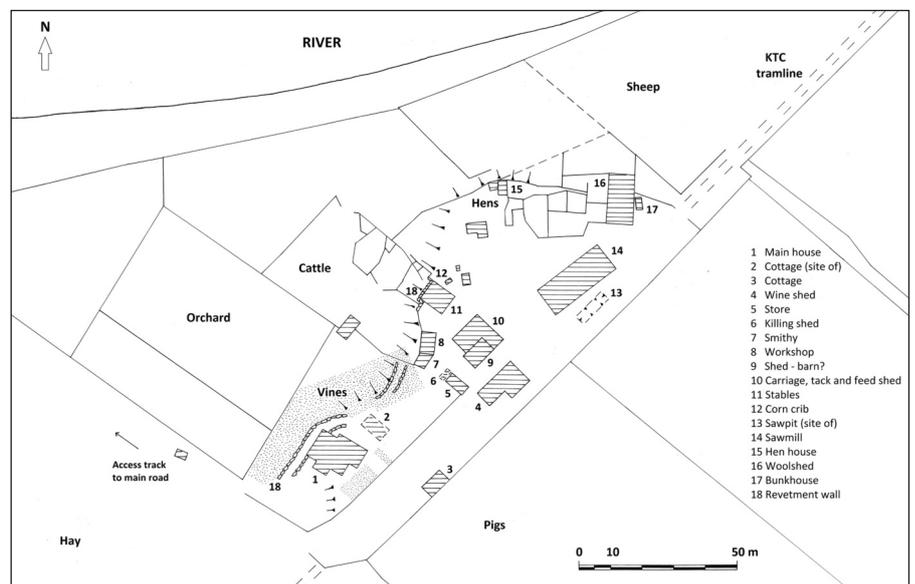


Figure 3: Site plan of the Devcich farmstead.

residence that forms the current farmhouse (Numbers 1 and 3 on Figure 3). The farmyard includes sheep pens associated with a woolshed. Plantings in the immediate vicinity include fruit trees and vines on lower ground between the farmstead and the river. Fenced enclosures for dairy cows are also located in this area. Open fields extend to the south, west and east of the farmstead, most of which are currently in pasture. Access to the farm is via a track and ford across the Kauaeranga River.

Many of the buildings that made up the early and mid-twentieth century farmstead remain. Some smaller structures near the farmhouse, including a two-roomed cottage and a killing shed, have been demolished, although part of the killing shed floor and a concrete path leading to the front door of the removed cottage survive. Other features include remnants of the KTC tramline and a large hollow interpreted as a sawpit.

The *zadruga* system

Family tradition relates that the now demolished two-roomed cottage was occupied by Simun and Matija Devcich and their children after settling permanently on the land in 1920, and before the larger house was erected for their use. Nikola Devcich and his wife Ruze are said to have either occupied the second cottage after moving to the farm a few years later, or moved into the first after it was vacated by Simun and Matija (Rand 1997:4; L. Devcich, pers. comm. 2011). This arrangement, whereby two brothers and their families lived side by side, occurred at a time when the farm was jointly owned, reflecting a common arrangement in Dalmatia and other parts of the former Yugoslavia, known as the *zadruga* system.

According to Violich (1998:89) 'Croatian tribal organisation ... fostered the development of the compact village and hamlet, or *zadruga*, clustered houses of an extended family, usually on slopes above the precious arable land.' The Devcich brothers came from Podgora, and the clustered nature of housing in that settlement and its connection with pockets of agricultural land, including vineyards, has been previously noted (Božić-Vrbančić 2008:56). *Zadruga* households usually contained two or more families, related by blood through the male line, which owned and farmed an area of land collectively. Traditionally all property, including food, tools, buildings and livestock, was shared. The number of people in a *zadruga* commonly ranged between 10 and 40, although smaller sizes were prevalent by the late nineteenth century. The *zadruga* had a hierarchical structure, in which members were ranked according to gender and age. It was patriarchal: land was jointly owned by adult married men, and the oldest male was usually the household head. While males born in the *zadruga* generally stayed within the household, females married out, and women from other *zadruga* married in. Other aspects of *zadruga* life were strongly defined according to age and gender, including the allocation of daily tasks. Men carried out herding, construction and heavy farm work, including the repair of implements. Women were responsible for cooking, cleaning and other domestic work, and helped in the fields at harvesting and other busy periods. Children also contributed, undertaking tasks such as herding small animals and poultry, while aged members assisted around the homestead (Bićanić 1981:124-125; Despalatović 1981:5-6, 2009:103-105; Trlin 1979:17).

Some clear similarities are evident between the spatial layout of the Devcich Farm with recorded examples of *zadruga* in varying areas of Croat settlement. The latter frequently contained small clusters of single-family houses and shared agricultural structures, and were associated with orchards, fields for mixed crops and pasture for livestock

(Lodge 1941: 70, endpiece; Violich 1998:8, 12, 15, 110, 277-279; Vittorelli 2002). In addition to the dwellings at the Devcich Farm, the surviving farm buildings consist of a wide range of structures recognisable in function, if not necessarily form, to those employed in some *zadruga*, such as storage sheds, stables, a hen house and corn crib. In terms of its immediate setting, the farmstead also lies at the centre of a landscape that includes a vineyard, orchard and pasture for cattle immediately to the north of the dwellings. Fields to the west and south, which are now in pasture, are known to have been previously used for producing hay and for raising pigs (L. Devcich, pers. comm. 2011).

While the presence of multiple dwellings can be seen to reflect an emphasis on cooperative, family-based production, many of these other similarities appear to be linked with the adoption of other aspects of the *zadruga* model, such as mixed agriculture. Mixed subsistence farming was a feature of peasant-based farms in Dalmatia and elsewhere because these enterprises were not strongly integrated into the cash economy and needed to produce most or all of a household's requirements. At Podgora, some families grew olives and figs, cultivated vegetables, and looked after animals such as sheep and goats, as well as tending vineyards (Božić-Vrbančić 2008:56). Although much larger and more consolidated than most holdings in their homeland (Trlin 1979:83), the Devcich Farm appears to have initially followed a mixed farming model that broadly accorded with Dalmatia's agricultural traditions.

Self-sufficiency also formed a significant component of such family-based subsistence agriculture, and encompassed both the initial production and recycling of farm materials. Although not restricted to Dalmatian migrants, self-reliance is strongly reflected at the Devcich Farm by the large sawpit, the mechanised sawmill, the smithy (with forge, bellows, anvil and fuel box), and a workshop with a vast array of items for re-use or repair. Reused elements in the farmyard include metal flumes from a demolished water race, used for fencing, and lengths of KTC rail track re-employed in the sawmill.

Interwoven with these physical expressions of *zadruga* life and activity is the gendered nature of this system. Accounts of family life at the Devcich Farm refer to a traditional division of labour, with the females of the household engaged at work in the kitchen, laundry and garden; and at milking. The males undertook most of the heavy farm work including breaking in the land, and tasks such as building construction (Rand 1997:3-4). Božić-Vrbančić (2008:148) has argued that strong family networks enabled traditional values from Dalmatia, including male dominance, to last longer in the new environment. Embedded in the Devcich farmstead is a spatial distinction between the cluster of houses at the west end of the complex, and other farm buildings around the farmyard to the east where smithing, animal husbandry, timber milling and other heavy work took place. Such distinctions can be seen to have not only reflected the separate roles allocated for men and women within the *zadruga*, but also to have helped perpetuate them through time.

Winemaking

Other distinctive aspects of the farm's operations that reflect Dalmatian influences were its vineyard, associated places of wine production and boulder-revetted terracing. Most Dalmatian villagers were engaged in viticulture, including in Podgora prior to the arrival of phylloxera (Božić-Vrbančić 2008:56-7). Anthropologist Brian Carey Bennett (1974:13) has referred to vineyards as 'one of the constant characteristics of Dalmatia'. Within the *zadruga* system, vine management was traditionally a male occupation (Despalatović 2009:104).

The Devcich family were engaged in wine production from the early 1900s. Prior to purchasing their farm in the Kauaeranga, the Devcich brothers had 0.2 ha (0.5 acre) under cultivation at Puriri in 1913, when they were one of 25 recorded groups or individuals of ‘Dalmatian’ origin growing outdoor vines for winemaking in New Zealand (*Wine Review* 1966). In the same year that they purchased the Kauaeranga farm, they were selling ‘grape vines, ready to bear’ (*Thames Star* 12 July 1915:1). Although a large vine of Isabella variety is said to have already been established on the Kauaeranga property prior to the arrival of the Devcich brothers, further vines were evidently planted including those of Niagara variety (Rand 1997:8; *Wine Review* 1975:12-13). By 1927, Simun and Nikola Devcich held a license to produce 500 gallons (2273 l) of wine, which could only be sold in small quantities ‘from their premises at Kauaeranga’ (Wine-maker’s License 1927). A store erected at the farmstead sold this and evidently other produce from the farm to local workers in gum digging camps further up the valley (Mulgrew *et al.* 1928).

The family’s operations at Kauaeranga were underway at a time when winemaking was an unusual activity. In 1923, there were just 72.5 ha under vines in New Zealand (Thorpy 1983:22). Settlers from Dalmatia and the broader region are considered to have been instrumental in the development of winemaking in New Zealand during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and subsequently fostered its survival in the face of opposition from prohibition groups and others (Trlin 1979:82-96).

The location of wine production and the close proximity of the main vineyard, house and winery to each other is similar to systems used in Dalmatia. At Korta Tomašević in Košarni Do, Jozo Tomašević noted that ‘our family’s house is on the downhill side, with the entry on the second floor. You then go down to the lower space, where wine pressing went on’ (Violich 1998:12). He added that in previous times all families had their own cellars, presses and barrels (Violich 1998:10). A study of Sutivan on Brač also noted the presence of wine cellars on the lower floors of village homes, in which wine was fermented (Bennett 1974:35-36). Devcich family sources state that the wine was initially produced in the basement of the main house (L. Devcich, pers. comm. 2011). The latter was evidently erected to accommodate such production, as it was deliberately built into the side of a terrace in order to contain a large basement below the main living quarters, even though plenty of flat ground was available for construction (Figure 4).

Close to the basement on its northern side was the main vineyard. As well as producing a useful crop, the vines may



Figure 4: Main house, with basement and vines (Robin Byron, NZHPT, 2011).

also have had significance as a focus of identity for the Devcich family. Violich (1998:282-283) noted the extent to which vines and vineyards were integrated into the daily pattern of urban life in the Dalmatian village of Kuna and provided the settlement with a stronger source of identity. Grape arbours on the house fronts at Kuna were to an extent mirrored by grapevines on the porch of his grandparent’s new home after moving to North America, which became a focal point for family identity (Violich 1998:26). The vineyard at the Devcich Farm is closely associated with the main house, and its position near the primary access track from the main road in the Kauaeranga Valley emphasises its visual significance from this direction. This can be seen not only to have proclaimed origins that were distinct from most others in New Zealand society, but also a different approach to activities such as alcohol production and consumption at a time when the influence of the temperance movement was strong. Vines still line garden paths between the house and farmyard, and between the house and access track, effectively mediating connections between the house and the outside world.

A further expression of Dalmatian identity may be reflected by the terrace into which the basement is cut. This is revetted for part of its length by stone walls erected of rounded boulders from the nearby river bed. Paths leading down to the main vineyard from the house are similarly revetted (Figure 5). This type of wall construction is uncommon in the wider Kauaeranga Valley (L. Devcich, pers. comm. 2011) and can be



Figure 5: Stone terracing in the vineyard (Author, NZHPT, 2011).

seen to reference the frequent stone terracing employed in Dalmatia for viticulture and other use (Božić-Vrbančić 2008:56; Violich 1998:89).

Wine production was eventually moved to a separate building that was erected in a nearby part of the farmyard by January 1931, as indicated by a date inscribed in its concrete threshold (Figure 6). This was initially rectangular in plan with a central doorway. Concrete walls supported an upper, timber-framed element, which contained flanking windows on either side of the door, and small opposing apertures with hinged doors or shutters in its east and west gables. Additions included a concrete west extension, and a rear lean-to containing a sink, tub and large copper. The building still contains a large wooden vat, ladles and other items linked with wine production. Wine continued to be made at the farm on a commercial basis until the mid-1970s (Rand 1997:9).

Although features linked with winemaking and the *zadruga* system reflect a strong on-going sense of identity linked with place of origin, the farm was not simply an attempt



Figure 6: Wine shed, with 1931 element in the foreground (Author, NZHPT, 2011).

to recreate a Dalmatian landscape in New Zealand. Numerous accommodations were made which took into account different climate, materials, cultural traditions and other factors within the new environment. For example, the construction of buildings within the farmstead generally encompassed the use of timber and corrugated iron, and later concrete, instead of the more traditional employment of stone, as at Podgora and elsewhere in Dalmatia. Likewise, in relation to the broader landscape, immigrants adapted to the fact that some plants strongly associated with traditional farming in Dalmatia could not flourish in the new environment. As such elements, or their absence, can help to shape as well as reflect human attitudes and behaviour, it is likely that such accommodations assisted in forging new and distinctive identities.

Pole-framed building

The intersection between identities linked with homeland and those developed through experience in a new environment can be illustrated by a large, monopitch-roof structure in the main farmyard at the Devcich Farm (Figure 7; Number 9 on Figure 3), which documentary and other evidence suggests was among the earlier buildings on the site. It appears in a photograph of the complex taken prior to the construction of other major farm buildings, and incorporates wire nails of a rhomboidal-head type that are similar to those found or noted in contexts elsewhere in the Auckland region between the 1890s and 1930s (Foster and Felgate 2011:52; Jones 2001:28-



Figure 7: Pole-framed building, showing vertical boards and corrugated iron lower cladding (Author, NZHPT, 2011).

9, 41). Although the building could date from the period before the Devcich family purchased the farm in 1915, its parallel alignment with the 1920s tramline suggests its construction at this time. It was certainly used and maintained by the Devcich family, indicating its absorption into daily life as a useful feature of the farmstead.

The structure is a rectangular building, measuring 8.2 m east-west x 5.05 m north-south. In its initial form, it had a centrally-positioned door in its south elevation. The building is up to 4.9 m high, and contains a small opening with wooden shutters in the upper part of its taller, northern wall. Its single-pitch roof form contrasts with the appearance of many free-standing farm buildings in New Zealand, which are more generally of gabled or hipped-roof type (see Thornton 1986).

The building is of unusual construction, built with a frame predominantly of mānuka (*Leptospermum scoparium*) – also known as tea tree – saplings (Figure 8). Posts, braces and rafters of mānuka survive in the round, and have been nailed together to form a basic frame. Individual saplings are generally between 70 mm and 100 mm in diameter, and have had their boughs removed. They have been deployed with their thicker diameters set at a lower level than their thinner tops. Diagonal bracing is of cross-brace style, and not cut into the uprights but placed flush against the inner face of each post. Some milled timber has been employed, for example as horizontal plates at the tops of the north and south walls, and as horizontal rails between the posts to allow external cladding to be affixed. For the most part, the building was initially clad with vertical boards that were mechanically sawn. The lower part of each wall, however, was covered with corrugated iron. Corrugated iron sheets were also used for the roof.

Inside the structure, several mānuka poles suspended horizontally from the rafters could, on the basis of their similarity to the frame, be primary in date. Raised platforms of milled timber appear to be later insertions, and are aligned with a secondary entrance arrangement. The current floor surface is earth. The building appears to have been designed to minimise the heating effects of the sun by having its monopitch roof facing south. Its original function is uncertain. One possibility is that it was a small barn for containing livestock, implements and other items.

The use of pole framing for a large building is unusual, particularly in a North Island context where kauri timber was being felled and milled. In his publication on nineteenth-century farm buildings in New Zealand, Thornton (1986) records a few instances of frames constructed of tree trunks and saplings in the round, although these generally appear to have been of heavier type. They include a small number of early South Island woolsheds, a smithy in the Mackenzie country and another woolshed at Mana Island near Wellington, which was built in 1887 by sheep farmer Mariano Vella from Dalmatia. More recently recorded examples include a woolshed at The Poplars Station in Canterbury, and a small group of pastoral and mining huts in Otago (Watson 2011:23-25; 2012:25-26).

Both the Devcich Farm and Mana Island buildings suggest a willingness by some Dalmatian settlers to employ framed structures created from inexpensive and readily-available materials, which is consistent with a self-reliant and subsistence approach to building construction. However, the lightweight mānuka-pole construction used at the Devcich farmstead also indicates evidence of specific New Zealand-based influences as mānuka framing was commonplace among itinerant workers living in the northern gum fields, a community to which the Devcich brothers had belonged and retained close connections.

Traditionally, mānuka frames had been employed by Māori in the erection of whare and related structures. Often

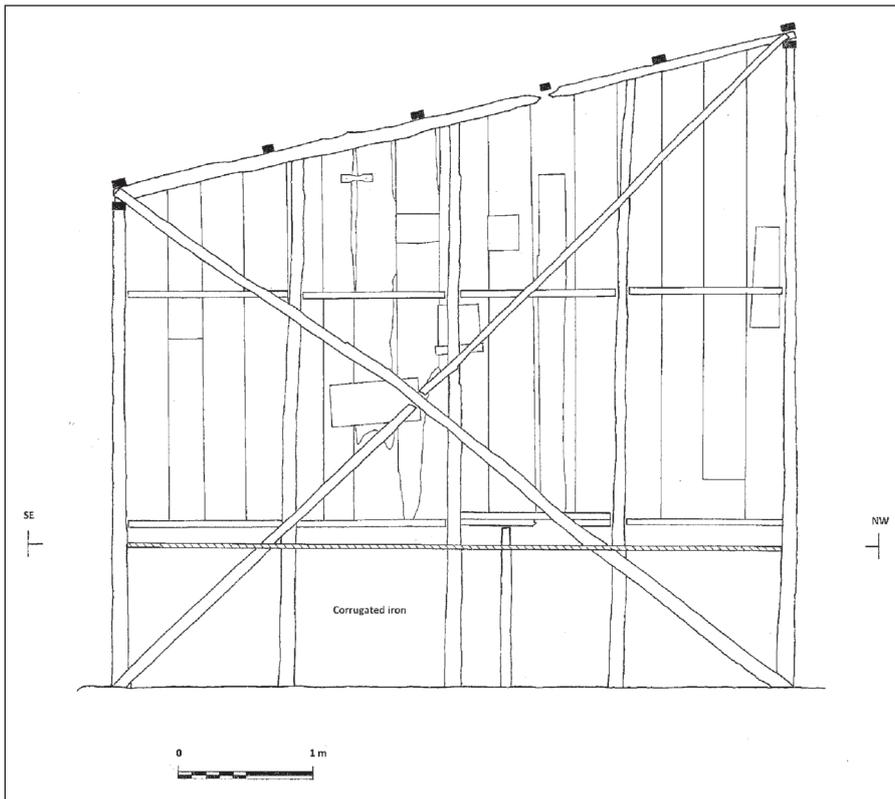


Figure 8: Southwest internal elevation of pole-framed building, showing mātuka posts, end rafter and diagonal cross-bracing.

thatched with nikau, reed or other materials, mātuka-frame structures continued to be employed by Māori into the early twentieth century (King 1996: 75), including on the gum fields (for example, Reed 1972: 144). The use of mātuka poles for framing huts and other structures in gum digging camps by Dalmatians and others is well documented (for example, Reed 1972:51-53; Trlin 1979:70-71). According to one account, members of the Devcich family themselves erected tents of strong mātuka poles when visiting the gum digging camps of the Kauaeranga in the late 1920s and 1930s (Rand 1997:8).

Božić-Vrbančić has written insightfully about the close relationship that developed between many Dalmatian migrants and Māori on the gum fields, partly forged by both groups being regarded by the dominant Anglo-New Zealand ideology as being of inferior social standing. Common connections led to the gum fields becoming a place of cultural production and a 'new home' for both Māori and Croat Dalmatians (Božić-Vrbančić 2008:108). One way in which this process occurred was literally through the construction of a shelter or new 'home'. The daughter of one gum digger on the northern gum fields has noted how her father and his colleagues were initially housed and fed by Māori before learning how to build their own raupo huts (Božić-Vrbančić 2008: 109). In such an instance, the erection of a structure not only potentially reflected a newly-shaped identity as a gum digger, but can also be seen to have assisted in identity-creation through the act of construction, and then subsequent occupation and maintenance. In his reminiscences, Simun Devcich specifically mentions both Māori and Dalmatians working on the gum fields in the upper Kauaeranga Valley shortly after his initial arrival (Jelicich n.d.). In this context, the creation (or integration) of a mātuka-framed structure at the farmstead can be seen not just as an expedient and low-cost practical measure but also as an outcome of activity on the gum fields and elsewhere, which may have forged shifts in identity and assisted in the creation of a 'new home' in New Zealand.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In examining issues of identity, Božić-Vrbančić (2008:96) has noted that after arriving in New Zealand many migrants from Dalmatia and related regions retained very strong connections to their homeland, to the extent of inverting David Lowenthal's statement about the past being another country (Lowenthal 1985). In the case of such migrants, it was the present that was a foreign country and the past that was familiar and reassuring. This may have been exacerbated in the face not only of difficult physical circumstances in their new environment, but also an awareness of being treated as 'other' by the dominant culture. At the time that the Devcich Farm was initially settled, tensions about perceptions of 'difference' were particularly high and family members were directly subjected to its effects.

The physical remnants of the Devcich Farm site and the surviving documentary evidence reveal complex, multi-stranded narratives of identity. Documentary evidence suggests that the family retained at least some identification with their homeland after settling in the Kauaeranga. Family members attended the annual 'Yuglosav' picnic in Auckland and Matija Devcich retained the traditional custom of supplying food for local Catholic nuns (Rand 1997:4, 7). The purchase of land for a farm in itself represented a connection with traditional activities. The Devcich brothers came from a society that was heavily involved in agriculture, and in which most ordinary people and families aspired to become independent landholders (Trlin 1979:41). In common with other settlers from Dalmatia (Trlin 1979:68), the Devcich family purchased ground that required improvement and put considerable effort into transforming it for more effective agricultural production. During this process, the landscape was shaped and moulded not just by factors distinct to New Zealand but also by cultural influences from Dalmatia.

The Devcich family's continuing identification with Dalmatian roots is perhaps most apparent in the functional and

spatial arrangement of the farmstead which lay at the heart of the farm's operations. Fundamental to its creation and use is a family-based identity founded on the *zadruga* model. However, expressions of *zadruga* identity were not uniform for every family member due to the household's stratified and patriarchal nature, and may have been reinforced by spatial divisions in farmstead layout. In this sense, aspects of identity linked with other socially-sanctioned distinctions such as gender appear to have been closely interwoven into on-going *zadruga* life.

Indications that identities were not static, but may have been reforged or reshaped by early experience in New Zealand are provided by the use or incorporation of physical elements that bear evidence of other cultural influences, such as in the pole-framed building. The lack of continuity of this tradition for the construction of later buildings in the farmstead may suggest that this particular type of expression formed a transitional phase – perhaps even pre-dating the emergence of a stronger expression of *zadruga* identity with the creation of a family settlement on the land. Božić-Vrbančić (2008:143) has referred to the general loosening of ties between Dalmatians and Māori after the former brought over wives from Dalmatia, established farms or migrated to the cities for work. As bonds founded on mutual oppression on the gum fields ceased, other cultural relations with Māori gradually declined.

Other strands of identity are likely to emerge with further exploration of the topic. A major issue is the extent to which identity was influenced and modified through on-going interaction in broader Pākehā society. Policies of assimilation continued to dominate official attitudes into the later twentieth century (Božić-Vrbančić 2008:147; Brooking and Rabel 1995:37), and there are hints that the Devcich Farm continued to evolve to accommodate shifting circumstances. For example, the *zadruga* model of ownership was converted into a single-family enterprise in 1939, after which changes to the economic basis of the farm also took place indicating less emphasis on self-sufficient models. Fuller exploration of interwoven identities linked with gender and age is also merited, particularly given the extent to which the *zadruga* system emphasised distinctions based on these factors. Similarly, the impact of social class or occupation could be examined in relation to the maintenance or the particular expressions of *zadruga* life.

Some aspects of identity at the Devcich Farm appear to have broader affinities with the experience of the Dalmatian immigrant community in New Zealand. For example, winemaking, mixed farming and family-based production were also notable features of Dalmatian farming in the Henderson area, west of Auckland (Trlin 1979:83). The Devcich Farm, however, will inevitably contain differences, whether connected to the individual backgrounds of its occupants or their particular experiences and opportunities in New Zealand. The property was, for example, significantly larger in size than most of the west Auckland farms. The Devcich family's status as landholders and traders also distinguished them from some other groups of Dalmatian migrants. In view of potentially complex variation, Smith (2004:260) has cautioned that 'community histories can seldom be constructed satisfactorily from a single site'. However, it is also true that a 'single site', if approached with care and context, can illuminate many of the experiences and transformations that help us understand the connections between individual and collective identities, and how traditional practices might be adapted and changed to suit new environments. In this respect, a single site such as the Devcich Farm highlights numerous strands of past experience and cultural diversity that still resonate in current society.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AEC	Alien Enemies' Commission
BDM	Births, Deaths and Marriages
CT	Certificate of Title
PR	Provisional Record

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