



# He tohu aroha ki ō mātou tūpuna 向我們的先人致敬 In honour of our ancestors

## TĀ MĀTOU KŌRERO

I te tau 1902, nā te totohutanga o te kaipuke o *SS Ventnor* i riro atu ngā tāne 13 me ngā waka koiwi Hainamana 499 ki te ākau o Hokianga. E whakanui ana tātou i te hunga kua riro me ngā tāngata nā rātou taua hunga i atawhai i ngā tau kua pāhure nō te totohutanga.

## 我們的故事

一九零二年(光緒二十八年)，《溫那》號輪船於霍基昂加海岸外沉沒，船內十三人罹難，所載四百九十九名華僑遺骨也於海難中失落。我們以《溫那》紀念碑銘記先人，及向自海難以來歷年代為看顧先靈的當地居民致意。

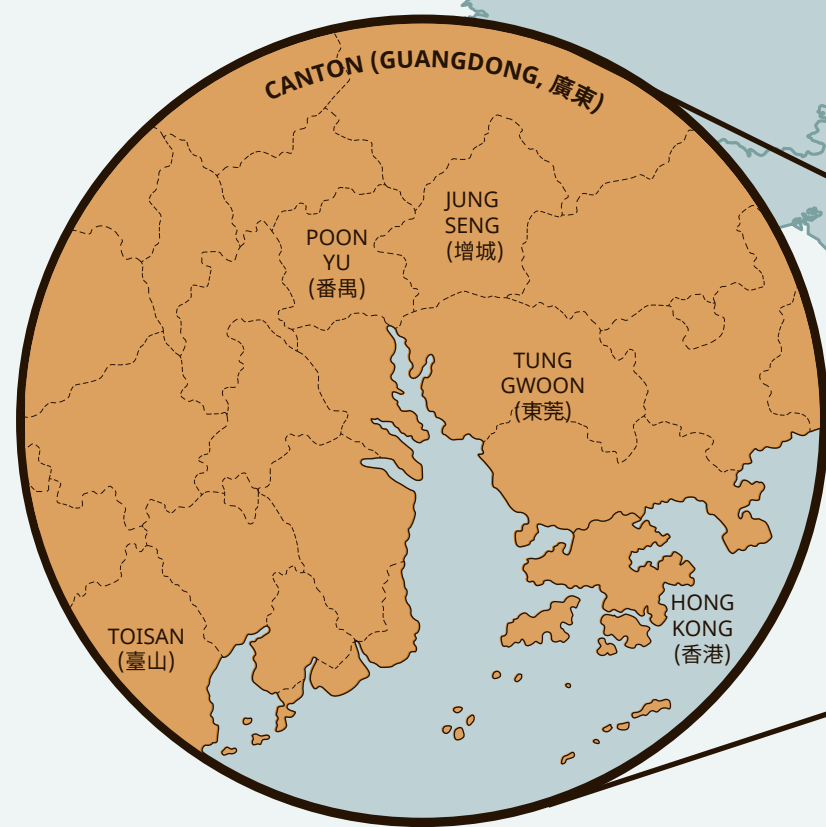
## OUR STORY

In 1902, the lives of 13 men and the remains of 499 Chinese were lost when the *SS Ventnor* sank off the Hokianga coast. We pay respects to the lost and all those who have cared for them in the many years since the sinking.

**AOTEAROA, WHENUA MOEMOEĀ**

**寄夢紐西蘭**

**AOTEAROA LAND OF DREAMS**



**Chinese miners came to the Otago goldfields in 1866. They weren't the first Chinese to come to Aotearoa, but they were the biggest group.**

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Many came from Poon Yu county (番禺縣), an area around Canton (Guangzhou) city which was badly affected by British and French invasions during the Opium Wars, as well as land shortages. The men dreamed of striking it rich and returning home to buy land. For many those dreams came true. Others weren't so lucky.



TERENGA WHAKAMUTUNGA

歸程

FINAL VOYAGE



“ ... how  
can we  
endure to  
sit on one  
side and  
look on?”

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–From the rules of the  
*Cheong Shing Tong*, 1878\*

By 1874 there were almost 5,000 Chinese in Aotearoa, mostly goldseekers. Some died before they could return to China. This was a terrible thing for the Chinese who believed that the dead should be returned home to join their ancestors and family. If this did not happen their spirits would be unhappy and they could become hungry ghosts, lost in the afterlife.

The Chinese community swung into action in 1878. They set up the Cheong Shing Tong (昌善堂) or “Splendid Goodness Society” to organise the return of the human remains (kōiwi). Collectors went all over Otago, the West Coast and even further north to raise funds.

In just five years, 283 “former friends” had been uplifted from their gravesites and their bones carefully packed. A tinsmith sealed the kōiwi in a zinc or lead box, and a carpenter custom-made the wooden boxes bearing the person’s name and village. In 1883, these were all loaded onto the *SS Hoihow* and safely delivered.

The group’s second shipment was much larger. In the late 1890s, planning got underway to return 499 kōiwi. Teams of men visited 37 locations from Invercargill to Auckland, and the group commissioned its own ship for the voyage – the *SS Ventnor*. It also arranged for nine elderly Chinese men to look after the kōiwi on their voyage. For a community of fewer than 3,000 people it was a major organisational task.

\* Published in English by *NZ Presbyterian*, 1 December 1883, pp 103-105

Photo credit: Members of the Cheong Shing Tong supervising the shipment of their deceased countrymen, *Otago Witness*, 29 October 1902 – courtesy of Toitū Otago Settlers Museum



## HE MOANA PAREKURA

### 海難

## TRAGEDY AT SEA



“The Ventnor stood almost upright for three or four seconds, and sank with a weird whizzing sound...”



# 1902

## SUNDAY 26 OCTOBER

### MORNING

The *SS Ventnor* was fully loaded when it left Wellington on Sunday 26 October 1902 in fine, clear weather. The international crew had never sailed in New Zealand waters before.

## MONDAY 27 OCTOBER

### 12:40AM

A later enquiry showed the ship off course by a few miles when, just after midnight, it hit a submerged reef just south of Cape Egmont. She managed to reverse but there was extensive damage. Captain Henry George Ferry steered for Auckland for repairs via Motuopao (Cape Maria van Diemen).

## TUESDAY 28 OCTOBER

### 9:30PM

The ship made it to the Hokianga before foundering about 10 miles out from the Hokianga Heads. The Omāpere signal station light was visible in the distance as the ballast tanks filled with water. At 9.30pm Tuesday 28 October, all hands were ordered to the lifeboats.

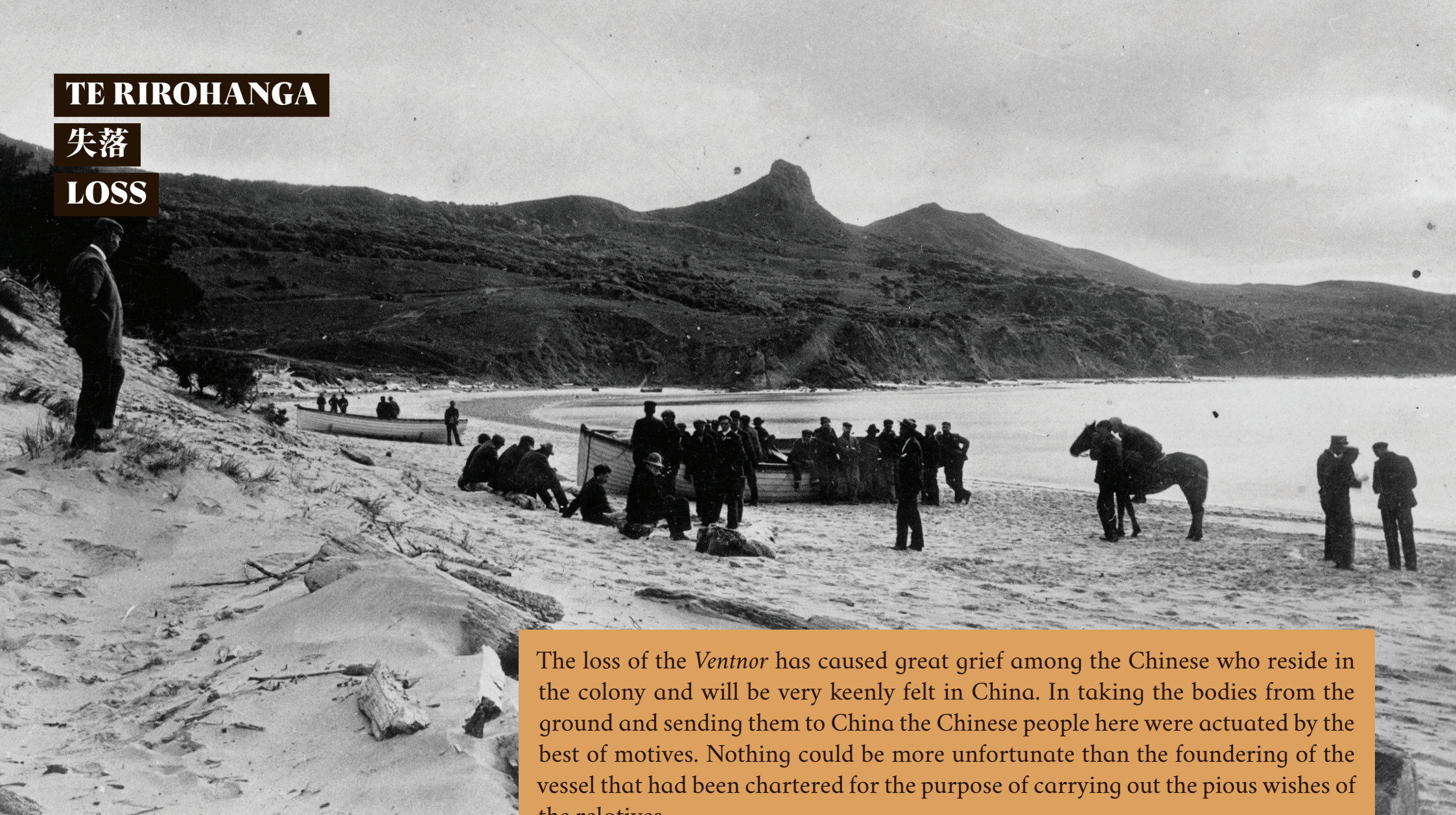
As the *Ventnor* sank the sight was an awful one. The water gradually rose over her deck to the stoke hole, when the stern lifted. The *Ventnor* stood almost upright for three or four seconds, and sank with a weird whizzing sound as a jet of flame burst from her funnel.



TE RIROHANGA

失落

LOSS



The loss of the *Ventnor* has caused great grief among the Chinese who reside in the colony and will be very keenly felt in China. In taking the bodies from the ground and sending them to China the Chinese people here were actuated by the best of motives. Nothing could be more unfortunate than the foundering of the vessel that had been chartered for the purpose of carrying out the pious wishes of the relatives.

—Thomas Quoi, *New Zealand Herald*, 31 October 1902, p5

**... local iwi and hapū buried the kōiwi in the sand dunes and in their urupā (burial grounds), and passed the story down through the generations.**

## THE SURVIVORS

Following the signal station light on the harbour's South Head (Ārai-te-Uru), and a bonfire on the beach, two of the four lifeboats made it to Omāpere before daylight. Seventeen crew members were safe. They had also picked up two survivors from the Captain's lifeboat who were in the water.

The search began for the other boats. The Hokianga Harbour master Captain George Martin was joined by the Cheong Sing Tong which had chartered the steamer *Energy* to aid in the search. Working together, they located and rescued 'six Europeans and four Chinese' from the third lifeboat.

The fourth lifeboat was Captain Ferry's. Varying reports suggested the Captain went down with his ship. But in early November the lifeboat, carrying 13 men, washed ashore north of Hukatere (on Ninety-Mile-Beach). All lives on that boat were lost.

The Bryers, Martin, and Andrewes families in Omāpere and Opononi cared for the *Ventnor* survivors as best they could, until all left on 5 November for Onehunga on the *SS Gairloch*.

## WHO WAS AT FAULT?

The inquiry into the *SS Ventnor*'s sinking found that she struck rocks because she was several miles off course. The international crew had never sailed in New Zealand before.

While the press reported extensively on the sinking and the rescue efforts, there was another untold side of the story. The pressure of the sinking had blown the hull of the *Ventnor* and released some of the cargo. As a result, coffins and bags holding kōiwi washed ashore along the Hokianga coastline from Kawerua to Mitimiti. With no one to explain who they were, local iwi and hapū buried the kōiwi in the sand dunes and in their urupā (burial grounds), and passed the story down through the generations.

The *Ventnor* sinking caused immense distress in the Chinese community. It was as if those who were lost had died twice, and the opportunity for closure taken away.



Top photo: Two lifeboats from the *SS Ventnor* on Omapere Beach, by Charles Peet Dawes. PAColl-5312. Alexander Turnbull Library

Right photo: Survivors from the *SS Ventnor*, AWNS-19021113-2-3, Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections.



**TE HONO KI TE ROROA**

**TE ROROA 情誼**

**BOND WITH TE ROROA**



**“Don’t  
forget  
to look  
after the  
Chinese  
wāhi  
tapu...”**

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After the sinking the bones came up on the shores south of the Hokianga Harbour. The people of Te Roroa gathered them and buried them in the dunes next to their own urupā. The bones were looked after for more than 100 years.

Alex Nathan, a Te Roroa kaumātua, remembers the words of his kuia. “She said, ‘Don’t forget to look after the Chinese wāhi tapu.’ She believed the places where their bones had washed up were just as important as if it had been our own ancestors.”

In 2007 Chinese descendants heard stories about the buried kōiwi. They visited Te Roroa to find out if the stories were true. Those people brought back more descendants, and in 2013 more than 100 Chinese returned for the unveiling of a plaque thanking Te Roroa for their care of their ancestors.

Top photo: Kawerua dunes

Bottom photos: descendants visiting the wāhi tapu; a plaque in three languages expresses thanks to Te Roroa for their care

Photographers, Billy Wong, for New Zealand Chinese Association, and Dr King Tong Ho



TE HONO KI TE ROROA

TE ROROA 情誼

BOND WITH TE ROROA



“Those lost Chinese – they’ve always been on my mind.”



**Te Roroa kaumātua Fraser Toi was the first to mihi the Chinese manuhiri. Like Alex Nathan, he grew up with the old stories.**

“My grandfather was part of the generation who found some of the boxes that came ashore in the harbour and landed below our home,” Fraser says. “Those lost Chinese ... they’ve always been on my mind.” Fraser felt the ancestors’ blessing on the day of the unveiling. “A spiritual feeling was there all the way through,” he says. “True aroha and compassion – it was a lovely day.”

“When we look at how the Chinese complete their cultural practices. It is my observation that there are some similarities, just on the way they do things. The way they respect their ancestors and the way they acknowledge them. Māori are the same, we acknowledge our ancestors and we can go back multiple generations and it’s important to acknowledge our ancestors, our mātua tūpuna that have gone before us. And I see that with the Chinese as well.” –*Snow Tane*

Top photo: Thomas Hohaia welcomes Meng Foon on to Pananawe marae.

Bottom photo: The Leong, Karatea-Goddard, Hakaraia and Ngan Kee families pay respects to the ancestors. Incense is offered in front of a table of traditional food offerings.



TE HONO KI MĀTIHETIHE MARAE

MĀTIHETIHE MARAE 情誼

BOND WITH MĀTIHETIHE MARAE



Ko Tarakeha te maunga

Ko Moetangi te awa

Ko Te Moana

Tāpokopoko-a-Tāwhaki  
te moana e papaki mai  
ana ki Te Ākau Roa

Ko Mātihetihe te marae

Ko Tūmoana  
te whare tūpuna

Ko Ngā Ringa Rau o  
Te Ākau te whare kai

Ko Hione te urupā

Ko Hāto Hēmi te  
whare karakia

Ko Te Tao Maui, ko Te  
Hokokeha ngā hapū

Ko Te Rarawa te iwi

Ko Tinana te waka

**“There’s a kōrero that  
says, ‘me hoki koe  
ki tō ūkaipō’ which  
loosely translates  
‘you should be  
returned to where  
you come from.’**

The thinking behind the Chinese people being taken back to their homeland is just as important to us as Māori, when somebody passes away, we want to take them back to where they were nurtured.

Ūkaipō talks about the nurturing of a baby on their mother’s bosom. That’s where you were nurtured, where you grow, and that’s where you should go when you pass. When our people pass away, they are taken back to their marae, whenua (land), to their ūkaipō. Since the arrival of the kōiwi on our shores, the remains have been under our guardianship. We have formed a beautiful relationship with the Chinese people, not only here in Mitimiti-North Hokianga, but also with Te Roroa-South Hokianga.”

—Nore Martin



**TE HONO KI MĀTIHETIHE MARAE**

**MĀTIHETIHE MARAE 情誼**

**BOND WITH MĀTIHETIHE MARAE**



‘In 2009 Te Roroa brought a Chinese delegation to Mātihetihe Marae to research more about the *Ventnor*. That’s when we started to connect. My job was to make sure our Uncle Pat Campbell, now in his late eighties, attended the meeting to share his knowledge. When the coffins came up on our beach, the bulk of them came to a place called Waihōpai, an ancient burial ground. In English it means “That place has a purpose”. It was agreed by the old people that the coffins, bones and remnants be buried near where they washed ashore.

–Doug Te Wake

“A group of people who had found remains washed ashore wanted to send them to Auckland so they could complete their journey back to China. At that time, roads were not well developed, and boats were the main form of transport. The plan was to place the remains on one of the “cream boats” that serviced the Motukaraka Dairy Factory, which would then meet the coastal shipping boat bound for Auckland. Unfortunately, the superstitious crew refused to take the remains onboard, fearing the same bad luck that had sunk the SS *Ventnor*. With nowhere else to go the remains were taken to the Rāwene Police Station, and a decision was made to store them in the cemetery until someone came to claim them.”

–Peter ‘Mingo’ Martin

## “The Red Gate memorial serves as a reminder of our eternal bond.”

“In 2009 our journey back to Mātihetihe with the Chinese descendants was like attending a kawē mate (mourning ceremony). I was proud of the bonding and respect shown between both cultures. Our tūpuna acted with love, dignity, and respect when they buried the remains that washed ashore. The Red Gate memorial serves as a reminder of our eternal bond.”

–Margaret Noble nee Moses

“It was an honour to know that my late father, Pāpā Joe Adams played a great part in the blessing of the Memorial at Hione Urupā. After mixing and mingling with our Chinese whānau I met a cousin, and tears rolled with such joy to know that I have this beautiful connection with them. Words cannot explain how I felt to be surrounded by our Chinese whānau – why was it too much for me to take in? Whanaungatanga. They knew my grandfather William, known as Willy Lum, and shared where he was from. I don’t know a lot about my Chinese side. I was brought up on my Māori side, but I am proud of my heritage and proud to have connected with my Chinese whānau. Blessed I am.”

–Susan Ann Te Maru, nee Adams

“The Tohu Whakamaharatanga in our urupā, the Red Gateway symbolises the respect and significance between our two cultures, Chinese and Māori. It’s a place where anyone can pay their respects to the ancestors that never made it back to their homeland. It falls in harmony with what we do as Māori, as kai-tiaki (custodians) to honour and care for the burial of the kōiwi (human bones) that washed ashore.”

–Nick Grace



NGĀ TAPUWAE O KUPE KI MANEA, HE TOHU WHAKAMAHARA

立於 MANEA FOOTPRINTS OF KUPE 的紀念碑

MEMORIAL AT MANEA FOOTPRINTS OF KUPE



# In 2021 Chinese and Māori gathered to dedicate a new memorial commemorating the Ventnor history and all those who were lost.

Built by the New Zealand Chinese Association at Manea Footprints of Kupe in Opononi, the memorial is a symbol of the unique bond between Chinese and Māori descendants. It's also a symbol of hope for the future.



"I had the simple idea of this uplifting wave-like form, as if rising from the ocean to the skies above. The steel stelae twist up and fan out to support bronze panels inscribed with the names of those who were lost. Leading to the bronze panels there are 499 perforations that gradually sweep upwards. We hope the visitor experiences this inspiring sense of uplift as they walk along the memorial."

—Richard Tam, Designer,  
TT Architecture

"The memorial may be about the past, but we built it for the future, for all New Zealanders. The care and respect and guardianship shown are the values that we share"

—Richard Leung,  
New Zealand Chinese Association

Top photo: The white lion bows in respect to senior kaumātua John Klarich. To the right is Peter Low, master of the Lion Dance Troupe.  
Bottom photo: The Ventnor memorial, Opononi.



NGĀ TAPUWAE O KUPE KI MANEA, HE TOHU WHAKAMAHARA

立於 MANEA FOOTPRINTS OF KUPE 的紀念碑

MEMORIAL AT MANEA FOOTPRINTS OF KUPE



The *Ventnor* story has seen the coming together of two cultures, sharing in protocols, ceremony and history. It has encouraged people to share their ancestral stories and personal connections to the history and nurtured a building of future relationships.

**“We appreciate and respect the journey we have shared with you people. We of Manea are proud to have been able to endorse/support our ancestors’ actions. We salute them.”**

—John Klaricich, Te Hua o te Kowariki Trust

“Learning about the history of our area is important, listening to the stories on the day helped us to appreciate the journey the Chinese were making and their longing to return home.”

— Mikaira Te Whata-Heremia

“Respecting our ancestors is another way of respecting ourselves and those around us”

—Meng Foon





KOTAHITANGA

結緣

COMING TOGETHER

“[This memorial is] a satisfying finishing of the whole process from the first encounters between our Chinese descendant group with different iwi. It’s a symbol of the ongoing relationship between us, because

**there’s no end of gratitude that we have towards those original people who found the bones, took them and looked after them on our behalf, until we turned up.”**

*–Lynette Shum, Granddaughter of the secretary of the Cheong Shing Tong*

**The drawing is a view of life.** The lower manaia represents past generations, and all we stand on and hold dear. The upper manaia represents future generations.

The kōwhaiwhai in between, from bottom to top shows a life span, with the accumulation of new experiences as life progresses.

*–Mark Klaricich, woodcarver*



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