



Context is everything

The journey of the whare Hinemihi from the desolation of the Mt Tarawera eruption in 1886 to a new home in the grounds of a Palladian manor house in an English country garden is a grand arc that encompasses war, devastation and recontextualisation. It is also the story of the enduring legacy of one of New Zealand's greatest carver artists Tene Waitere. A+O's Hamish Coney visited Clandon Park in Surrey to gain an insight into Hinemihi's physical *and* cultural context. Photographs by Sarah Smuts-Kennedy.

Driving through the leafy lanes of Surrey on a balmy English summer's day is not one of life's greater chores. After an hour or so bowling along the M3 from London we take the Guildford turn off and soon find ourselves in an extremely green and pleasant land. The adjoining counties are Hampshire, Sussex, Kent and Berkshire of *Wind in the Willows* fame. We are in the heart of the fertile English Home Counties – a pastoral idyll of thatched roofs, country pubs and the occasional squirrel.

Our destination is Clandon Park, the family seat of the Onslow family, amongst whose descendants was the fourth earl, William Hillier Onslow (1853 – 1911) Governor General of New Zealand from 1889 to 1892. It was Onslow who acquired Hinemihi in the early 1890s as a memento of his time

in the colony, effectively saving the ailing whare *and* removing it from its homeland forever. That Hinemihi is still standing some 122 years later is a cause for celebration and thanks for the prescience of the Earl of Onslow at a time when the whare's survival was very much in the balance.

Hinemihi was not unknown to me, having first come onto my radar via both photographer Mark Adams peerless body of work¹ focussing on the achievement of the Ngāti Tarāwhai master Tene Waitere (1854 – 1931) and the pre-eminence accorded Tene by Professor Roger Neich in his definitive history of Māori carving in the post-colonial era *Carved Histories*.²

The dramatic sweep of

Hinemihi and Waitere begins in the early 19th century before the artist's birth in 1854. In the mid 1820s the traditional Te Arawa homelands of the Rotorua Lakes area was the subject of numerous battles and skirmishes with raiding Ngāpuhi war parties, most notably led by Hongi Hika. It was after the 1823 attack on Mokoia island that Waitere's mother Ani Pape, herself a half-sister to another Ngāti Tarāwhai master carver Anaha Te Rahui (1822 – 1913), was carried away as a prisoner by Ngāpuhi to the Bay of Islands. Forcibly married into the Ngāpuhi tribe, Ani bore two children before she was returned to Rotorua by her brother Anaha in 1857. The influence of Christian missionaries had discouraged the traditional practice of taking battle slaves and moves were made to repatriate those taken during the conflict of the 1820s. Anaha returned his sister and children into the Ngāti Tarāwhai heartland of Ruato on the shores of Lake Rotoiti. It was here a young Tene was apprenticed to be a carver under the tutelage of the master Wero Taroi (circa 1810 – 1880) with whom he collaborated on numerous projects including Hinemihi. His sister Mereana married another Ngāti Tarāwhai master Neke Kapua. Waitere's turbulent early history throws into relief two enduring threads: the effects of displacement endured by Māori as conflict and colonisation after the Treaty of Waitangi redrew tribal, economic, and political boundaries *and* the

1. Mark Adams and Nicholas Thomas *Raaru, Tene Waitere, Māori carving, colonial history*, University of Otago Press, 2009

2. Roger Neich *Carved Histories, Rotorua Ngāti Tarāwhai Woodcarving*, Auckland University Press, 2001

steps Māori took to secure their cultural patrimony in the face of these, at times, life threatening forces. Tene Waitere's early history is ample demonstration of the deeply interwoven bloodlines and kinship that sit at the heart of the Ngāti Tarāwhai school. It brings to mind a similar vigorous, dynastic and creative powerhouse: that of the Bellini of 16th century Venice and bears all the same hallmarks: multi-generational, with blurred lines of authorship and collaboration, but most of all both the Ngāti Tarāwhai carvers of the 19th and early 20th century and the Bellini in their era were acknowledged as peerless exemplars of their art.

The story of Hinemihi is bound up with that of the resourceful and entrepreneurial Te Arawa people of the mid 19th century. Tarawera and Lake Rotomohana in the centre of their tribal rohe in the Bay of Plenty had become a major tourist attraction, a geothermal wonderland. The jewel in the crown, the famed Pink and White Terraces had become the biggest drawcard in Aotearoa in the 1870s. Tourism was in its infancy, but Te Arawa were becoming wealthy on the proceeds of this dazzling natural wonder.

Hinemihi was commissioned by the Tūhourangi chief Aporo Te Wharekaniwha and opened in early 1881 situated at the village of Te Wairoa near the entrance to the Pink and White Terraces. Today this is

the site of the Buried Village. Funded from revenues created by visitors to the Terraces (which at their peak topped 6000 pounds per annum or about one million dollars in present day terms) the whare was intended as a community centre for functions and performances. It was also very much intended as an assertion of Te Arawa commercial mana. Legend has it that Hinemihi o te Ao Tawhito (of the old world) was soon referred to as Hinemihi of the golden eyes in reference to the gold sovereigns that reputedly replaced the more usual paua shells used to represent eyes within carved figures – a 'new world' affectation, but tellingly an indication that Te Arawa were very much aware of the commercial power they had developed. In less than ten years Te Wairoa became one of the wealthiest villages in New Zealand.

That all changed early on the morning of 10 June, 1886 with the eruption of Mt. Tarawera, the destruction of the Pink and White Terraces and the scattering of the Te Arawa people. Hinemihi was one of the few surviving structures in a volcanic onslaught which claimed 153 lives including many of the residents of Te Wairoa. Tene Waitere and his family were amongst the handful of survivors who took refuge within Hinemihi which almost buckled under the weight of volcanic debris.

Hinemihi arrived at Clandon Park in April 1892 and has spent her last 122 years in relative seclusion on the grounds of the estate. In



this time she has acquired a few odd additions including the thick thatch roof in 1978, believed to be an error arising from the appearance of the whare covered in ash immediately after the 1886 eruption.

This dramatic history precedes the visitor to Clandon Park in 2014. Hinemihi's story and her place within the narrative of both New Zealand and the grand Ngāti Tarāwhai tradition is both incredible and assured. Still, all of that does not prepare the New Zealand visitor for the almost surreal experience

of encountering a Māori whare in the grounds of a Palladian mansion in rural England. The visitor sees the house first, surrounded by expanses of lawn and formal gardens. The house is the work of Venetian architect Giacomo Leoni (circa 1686 – 1746) and dates to the early 1730s.

At a distance of some one hundred and fifty metres from the mansion, Hinemihi sits sheltered amongst a grouping of trees and shrubs. She faces the main house and the tension created between the two very different structures

opens a visual discourse that is at once perplexing and inviting. Two very different but intertwined cultures are engaged in architectural dialogue. For the New Zealand visitor this first encounter comes freighted with two centuries of history and feels emotionally charged. Regardless of whether the viewer has any knowledge of Hinemihi's journey it is impossible not to be transfixed by the whare's presence as well as the magnificent setting.

In discussion with Claire Nodder who has recently returned from New Zealand

to take up the position of House Manager at Clandon Park it soon becomes clear that Hinemihi is doing some heavy cultural lifting for Aotearoa as a centre for the activities of the UK Māori community whose activities are co-ordinated by the Ngāti Rānana London Māori Club and as a site of pilgrimage for New Zealanders, including the New Zealand Olympic Team in 2012.

Ms Nodder has extensive experience in New Zealand via roles at Te Papa, The Whangarei Museum and Heritage Park and the Otago Settlers Museum in

Dunedin. She also worked on an important project documenting the extensive collection of the Waitangi Treaty house and environs.

Since 1956 The National Trust has managed Clandon Park. In recent years Hinemihi's condition and future conservation requirements have become a priority and an active plan has been formulated to ensure that the 122 year old whare enjoy a long future as one of New Zealand's most significant taonga outside our shores.

The establishment of the





Burton Brothers
Aporo and Ngareta at Wairoa
Circa 1881-5
albumen print

Burton Brothers
Rununga House (Hinemihi), Wairoa
Circa 1881-5
albumen print

Frederick Muir for Burton Brothers
Rununga House, Wairoa, after
eruption June 10. 86
July 1886
albumen print
image courtesy of Michael Graham-Stewart



friends of Hinemihi group Te Maru O Hinemihi³ in 2012 has helped to strengthen ties to Ngāti Rānana, the local community and Ngāti Hinemihi in New Zealand. The group has been working with the National Trust to consult with stakeholders to formulate a plan for Hinemihi's long term care. The aim is to restore the whare as close to her original form as is possible. A number of significant changes are proposed. For example the house is approximately a third smaller in form that her original footprint at Te Wairoa and the goal is to rectify this and to conserve all of the twenty three major carvings. This work will involve the dismantling of Hinemihi and conservation and strengthening of all of her structural parts and the replacement of the current thatched roof with a shingle roof as she enjoyed when first constructed in 1881. Already work has begun on the creation of new woven tukutuku panels to be installed when the complete restoration

work is undertaken. Basic security and fire alarm systems will be installed as well and measures taken to ensure weather tightness all year round. There have been a number of partial cleans and restorations in recent times but the substantive plan proposed by the National Trust will require substantial funding. As Content magazine is published the Clandon Park team, the National Trust in conjunction with Te Maru O Hinemihi are preparing a funding bid to the UK Heritage Lottery Fund to secure funds that will greenlight this major restoration project.

Perhaps the final word needs to come from Jim Schuster, Tene Waitere's great, great grandson. Schuster is a Māori heritage adviser at Heritage New Zealand *Pouhere Taonga* and has enormous experience in engaging with marae and historic whare as both important artistic taonga and living buildings performing vital social functions within the daily

lives of iwi. Schuster is also a key member of Te Maru O Hinemihi and uniquely placed to share his vision for the future of the displaced whare, "she needs people and to be able to cater for her visitors. When she is ready to come home she will. Probably that will not be in my lifetime. Today she is doing an important job for UK based Māori, their children and visitors." He goes on to explain that in the course of time most marae houses are constantly upgraded to meet the needs of a marae and iwi, "You know she has survived two world wars when there were bombs dropping all around but today she needs a few basic upgrades like electricity, proper windows and floors and even sanitation so guests can stay in the whare overnight. With funding we can attend to these practicalities".

³. to find out about the activities of Te Maru O Hinemihi see www.hinemihi.co.uk/