

He Tohu

Lillie Le Dorré

Archives New Zealand

He Whakapapa Kōrero, He Whenua Kura
Talking about our past to create a better future

Friday 19 May 2017 saw the culmination of many years' hard work when the Governor-General of New Zealand, Her Excellency the Rt Hon Dame Patsy Reddy, officially opened *He Tohu*, the new permanent exhibition at the National Library of New Zealand (National Library) in Wellington. At the centre of *He Tohu* are three taonga that shape New Zealand: 1835 He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tirenī – Declaration of Independence of the United Tribes of New Zealand; 1840 Te Tiriti o Waitangi – Treaty of Waitangi; and the 1893 Women's Suffrage Petition – Te Petihana Whakamana Pōti Wahine.

He Tohu includes a stunning, state-of-the-art conservation space that will see our fragile and irreplaceable documentary heritage preserved for future generations. This is supported by an interpretive exhibition that provides onsite and online learning experiences and resources, particularly for New Zealanders aged 10-15 years old. With a focus on the history of the documents and their ongoing significance to our national life, *He Tohu* improves public access to these important taonga, with a larger display space and extended opening hours. The exhibition will be in place for at least the next 25 years.

For Archives New Zealand (Archives) and its staff, the new exhibition has been a presence for a number of years, with Archivists Stefanie Lash and Jared Davidson working as Lead Curator and Curator respectively since 2014. Conservators Anna Whitehead, David Adams and others played a key role in preparing the documents for the next chapter of their journeys and will continue this role going forward. While the taonga are now housed in the National Library building, they remain under the care of the Chief Archivist.

Two key events for Archives staff took place in the build-up to the opening on 19 May 2017: the closure of the Constitution Room on 11 April 2017; and the move of the taonga on 21 April 2017.

Closure of the Constitution Room

Prior to *He Tohu*, the three taonga, along with other constitutional documents, were housed in the Constitution Room, opened at Archives House in 1990. The closure of the Constitution Room was required some weeks ahead of the taonga move to allow the conservators to prepare the documents for the move to their new home. The room closed to the public on 7 April 2017, and shortly after, a staff event was held to formally close the room.

Organising this event involved input from staff across Archives, and required careful consideration of the appropriate tikanga for the occasion and location. Located on the shores of Whanganui-a-Tara, Archives' Wellington office functions under the maru (shelter/authority/safeguard) of Te Atiawa and Taranaki Whānui. The tikanga or customary values and practices of Te Atiawa and Taranaki Whānui therefore guide the organisation.

The morning of 11 April 2017 began with a karakia, led by kaumātua Kura Moeahu. Staff filled the Constitution Room, tracing their hands over the document cases, before singing the Archives waiata *Te Manaaki Taonga*. After kai, a kawē mate process commenced. Kawē mate is a type of memorial service that sees the memory of the deceased taken home. This was considered the most appropriate process for bidding farewell to the taonga, and the tīpuna whose signatures and marks line the pages, as it is usually used in places where the deceased was well-known and loved, but was not buried.

Throughout the kawē mate, a range of emotions were expressed, from laughter as Jeremy Cauchi reminded us of the years before the taonga came to Archives, to tears as we remembered the loss felt at learning that the taonga were to be relocated, and for some, the difficult few years that followed. We also acknowledged the connections to the taonga for those who were not with us – our late kaumātua Sam Jackson, and former staff members who have since left Archives.

During the afternoon, we looked to the future of the taonga. Stefanie Lash and Jared Davidson delivered a presentation on their in-depth research into the many signatories of the documents, highlighting the challenges and triumphs of archival research. We were treated to a sneak peek of the interactive map table and document tables that make up part of the interpretive display that wraps around the document room. *He Tohu* Project Manager Rob Stevens then provided an update on the build and development of the exhibition generally.

A final karakia was said before long-serving Archivist Tony Connell

closed the door to the Constitution Room symbolically for the last time. Māori tikanga always concludes with an hākari or feast to lift tapu from the day and to ensure everyone leaves well-nourished, both in body and soul; the meal enjoyed that evening topped off what was for many a very emotional day.

Taonga Move

The three *He Tohu* taonga were moved between the Archives and National Library buildings in the early hours of 22 April 2017. While this journey was only two-hundred metres, preparations for the taonga move on 22 April 2017 began months in advance, and involved staff from across Archives, the National Library and the wider Department of Internal Affairs. This event included a pōwhiri at Waiwhetu Marae, the move procession itself, the ceremony inside the National Library, followed by kai at the Pipitea Marae. Around 560 people participated in the event. Again, we were led by the constant guidance of kaumātua Kura Moeahu.

The taonga needed to be moved in a way that ensured the security and preservation of the documents, the health and safety of the staff and guests, and incorporated appropriate and meaningful tikanga. Several options for how the move would be carried out were considered. The chosen option saw the taonga transported in a specially-adapted vehicle between the front entrances of the two buildings. This option addressed preservation and security concerns, while allowing for some visual and physical proximity to the taonga, which was a key tikanga consideration.

Technical Considerations

Due to the fragile nature of the taonga, care needed to be taken to ensure the taonga did not suffer any damage. Parchment is prone to shrink and flex outside of a controlled environment; any movement or vibration can cause the iron gall ink that carries the signatures to crack and flake. Three large, weather-resistant wooden crates with internal cushioning were used to transport the taonga. Each crate was carried by a team of twenty-two Archives staff, trained and experienced in manual handling. The Crate Crew dedicated hours to practicing for this event and their reverence set the tone for this historic occasion, acknowledging the documents' mana.

A number of options for the vehicle to move the taonga were investigated. While it is best practice to move high value or fragile archives in a specialised vehicle that has air-ride suspension to minimise the potential impact during long journeys, a thorough

test of the available vehicle options found that the best option had no air-ride suspension and an automatic transmission. The chosen vehicle was then adapted by placing pieces of closed-cell foam beneath each of the crates before they were fastened in place. The foam absorbed shock, further mitigating the risk of damage to the taonga.

Tikanga

Kaumātua Kura Moeahu, Te Ati Awa tohunga (expert spiritual leaders) and the kaikaranga (woman with role of ceremonial calling), met inside Archives House with Archives staff ahead of the 4:00am start to lead the procession. A pūtātara (conch shell) heralded the start of the journey – the kaikaranga began her call, the crate crew lifted the purpose-built crates housing the taonga, and slowly proceeded out the front door of Archives House to the specially adapted vehicle that awaited them. Kaihoe (waka paddlers) enclosed the procession, led by iwi kaumātua and tohunga reciting karakia, while Archives staff walked alongside with their hands on the panels of the vehicle to guide it.

The Royal New Zealand Navy, who has a long history of association with the Treaty of Waitangi, was also in procession, with their Colour Guard tipping their flag to the taonga as they departed Archives and again as they were unloaded at the National Library.

Once outside the National Library building, the karanga echoed out. The crate carriers entered first with the taonga, behind the tohunga. A poi manu recitation was heard – this Parihaka customary practice is a way of imparting tribal narratives and recalling significant events – as the taonga were carried down the centre aisle of the main hall and placed on a wide plinth at the front of the room. Members of the paepae (speakers bench) hongied and took their seats. Wāhine sat either side of the taonga, as in a tangihanga (funeral ceremony).

An ecumenical service of thanksgiving was then held, followed by whakatau (greeting speech) and whaikōrero (formal speech) from kaumātua of manawhenua and iwi Māori. The speakers at the ceremony thanked Archives staff for the care they gave to the three taonga. They also recognised the importance of including the Suffrage Petition in *He Tohu*.

Cultural Competence

With Te Tiriti o Waitangi at the heart of our holdings the values and responsibilities of this founding document are central to the work

Archives' undertakes, whether this is providing access to records, issuing a new recordkeeping standard, or opening a new exhibition. The drive to work within the spirit of Te Tiriti goes beyond lip service, to an organisational culture where positive working relationships with Māori, promoting the principles of consultation, cooperation and partnership, are becoming a way of life.

This spirit has been at the core of Archives' *He Tohu* activities – and in the development of He Tohu itself – for the past three years. A key example of this is the building up of tikanga knowledge so that all Archives staff can confidently participate in events with a cultural element. Having a workforce that is knowledgeable and confident in te ao Māori helps to break down the institutional anxieties that can be present in our Māori users. Working with our kaumātua, Kura Moeahu, staff have grown in their understanding of local tikanga, and this has empowered them to feel confident, ask questions and build stronger relationships with the people who use our services.

This spirit can be seen again in the Archives waiata rōpū, Ngā Manu Iere, who joined forces with the National Library waiata rōpū to support many of the speakers at the *He Tohu* taonga move and opening events. This commitment continues as various official parties make the pilgrimage to *He Tohu*.

The commitment to working within the spirit of Te Tiriti o Waitangi continues for Archives, despite the distance between our office and the taonga. Our role continues, just in a different whare. The taonga have been given life in new and exciting ways through extensive research into the stories of each document's signatories.

The first half of 2017 has been a challenging but ultimately rewarding period for Archives. Team Archives performs its duties with the greatest professionalism and care and this has enhanced the mana of Archives New Zealand, bonding us together and to the taonga. With the National Library as our partners, we are looking forward to presenting these documents to new generations of New Zealanders for at least the next 25 years.