

Titiro ki muri: Resurfacing Māori Collections through Improved Arrangement & Description – a case study¹

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Introduction

This paper is a reworked version of a talk originally given within the 'Identity' theme at the ICA Congress in Brisbane in August, 2012 and then re-presented at the ARANZ conference 'Inside and Outside the Box' in Wellington in October, 2012. In that talk, we used a case study to discuss how the Alexander Turnbull Library has developed and implemented tools to enhance archival descriptive practice relating to Māori materials. This paper contains substantially the same information, but has been re-ordered and updated for publication, while still retaining the presentation dynamics as we have indicated our respective contributions.

*"For Māori researchers, it is into a Pākehā whare (house) that they must enter, and it is with a Pākehā key that the door will be opened. But behind that door and within the many rooms of that house, there are precious taonga Māori that can contribute to the maintenance of mana Māori."*² (Royal, C. 1990).

Ariana: The above quote was written in the Turnbull Library Record 23 years ago by Charles Royal in his chapter about the Māori collections held in the Alexander Turnbull Library. I think this is a really poignant quote, and one we should still think about often. How can the library be more of a Māori whare? Should we be content for Māori to keep seeing us as a Pākehā whare? What can we do to ensure Māori can open our doors with their own key?

I have been the Māori specialist in the Arrangement and Description (A & D) team for over a year now, and before I started here, I barely knew what 'arrangement & description' meant. At my interview I made the statement that I was mostly interested in connecting Māori communities to their taonga. One of the interviewers said, well that is exactly what will happen if we describe the collections better, it will make them more findable and lead to greater access.

In my first large arrangement & description project, I found that enhancing our records of a collection of letters known as ‘the Atkinson Māori letters from Taranaki’, has indeed launched a resurfacing of these taonga back into the consciousness of the people they most relate to (i.e. the descendants of those tūpuna who wrote them), and has led to greater engagement and potential for further collaboration.

Case Study

The ‘Atkinson Māori letters from Taranaki’ (MS-Group-0031, 252 letters) were suggested as a candidate for digitisation recently, because they are ‘A rare surviving example of 19th C. letters between Māori rather than from Māori to European. Found during the land wars and passed to language scholar A. S. Atkinson’.³

The collection is called the Atkinson collection after Arthur Samuel Atkinson who was an immigrant from England in the 1850s. Atkinson was the editor of the Taranaki Herald in the 1860s during the Taranaki land wars. He and his brother were very involved with the wars, fighting against Māori who were striving to retain their tribal lands.⁴

Most of the 252 letters were taken from two villages, Mataitawa and Paikamahoe, when they were burnt and destroyed. At the time, the letters were analysed for military intelligence and then studied by Atkinson who wrote about them and translated some of them in his newspaper. Among other interests, Arthur Atkinson was a philologist with a particular interest in the Māori language. His papers on Māori language and vocabulary were incorporated into the fifth edition of the Dictionary of the Māori Language, published in 1917⁵ and his contributions are still acknowledged in the current 7th edition.⁶

When I first started at the Turnbull in December 2011, the collection had been scheduled for digitisation as a part of a large project which prioritised collections in Māori, and A&D had been asked to consider ways to put the contextual metadata online with the scanned copies. At that time, there was a ‘top level’ group record online, linked to an item record for each folder, saying only ‘Correspondence, [date range]’. However, there was also a paper inventory available in the reading room, which held a far greater depth of information. We thought briefly about attaching this inventory to the group record as a pdf, but then we decided to put the time into creating a new record for each letter. This would not only make the information more discoverable and usable, but facilitate our Image Services team’s work of attaching the digital copy of each letter to its specific record.

 Whonaiti pa Māhe 22 1865
 Kua ake e tahi atu ki
 tohu taina kia Tautahi
 ariki e hōa tana kōe
 me te iwi me ngātuanui
 me nga kuni me Whakato
 maki mai inga maki atu
 tangi ki tane i whaka tau
 kīria e otana tipuna e hōa
 kēi te noho pūnui kua rēo
 to tana mahua me tatau
 Tautahi kua rēo atu ki
 tangata mo te kōwhiri
 maha e hōa kapa i rēo
 kōhi te pūh kōrero a otana
 tipuna te pūh atu aroti
 a) kia kōroa mai kōe tēnei
 ano te iwi me

Kia Tautahi Ariki
 Hei Whakato

Figure 1: fMS-Papers-2327-16-07, p1 of letter to Tautahi Ariki from Tianara Hapurona, 22 March 1865 (Alexander Turnbull Library).

I would have liked to have worked more with the actual letters and put even more detailed information in about content or subjects, but for expediency's sake and thinking of the project as a stage in an incremental process, we decided just to work from the inventory. Along the way I found some tools that became very important for the arrangement and description process. In particular, a thesis done about some of the letters from this collection and available online, which made it easier to identify some of the tūpuna who feature in the letters.⁷ The thesis also contained a map from which I was able to deduce tribal names from the place names, which enriched our descriptions.⁸ I also found the Te Kāhui Māngai⁹ website and the iwi boundaries map¹⁰ on the Taranaki Regional Council website very useful.

Nicola: My section of this paper will talk about some of the existing tools with which Ariana worked, the evolving nature of our finding aids online, and the facilitation of community input to description in the future.

In the broadest sense, this project fits within a process of continual improvement by which the Library has been attempting to increase access to Māori materials since the appointment of its first specialist staff member in 1979.¹¹ Now, Ariana is one of seven specialist Māori staff who are spread across each aspect of the Library's business. Her role sits within an A&D team which was created during the Library's restructuring in 2011 and is expected to work equitably across formats. The presence of a specialist who can focus on improving our tools and practice is already leading to more confident A&D of Māori material, including digital material, by the team as a whole.

Ariana's first major A&D job enhanced an online description from one reference to '18 folders of letters written in Māori', with the single provenance of a colonial collector, to descriptions of 252 items and the addition of hundreds of names of authors, recipients, iwi and places – Māori terms which make it easier to find Māori materials. As one would expect, the simple allocation of additional A&D resources to undertake an extra level of item description and publish it online enormously enhanced the access to these letters.

However, this mahi has also strengthened our understanding of the provenance and context for these letters.

The illustration to this section attempts to show the passage of individual letters into different groupings over time. The letters were written by a variety of people from different locations to people living in various kāinga in Taranaki. Most of the letters were taken from two kāinga

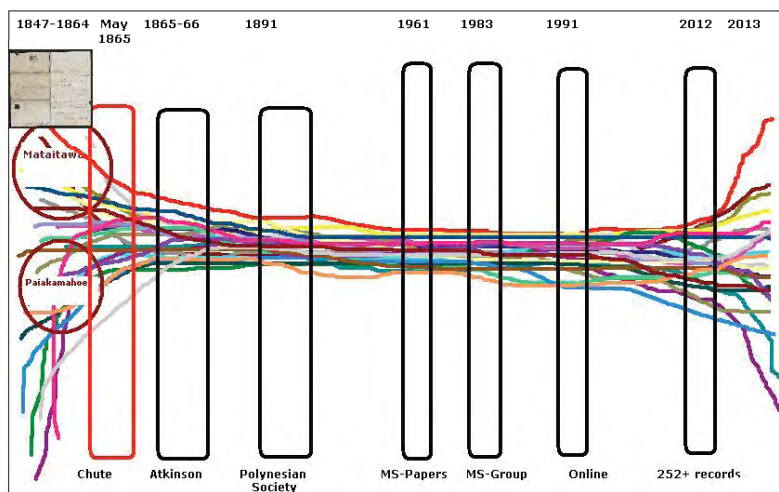


Figure 2: A correspondence network over time.

– Mataitawa and Paikamahoe, when these villages were destroyed. They were gathered up by Major Chute to be analysed for military intelligence. They were then given to Arthur Atkinson, who ran a philological eye over them, and possibly added others that he was given separately. In his role as editor of the Taranaki Herald, Atkinson transcribed, translated, and published some of the letters, sometimes under the heading of 'Māori literature'. At some time, Atkinson's collection was placed with the Polynesian Society records, which were deposited with the Alexander Turnbull Library in 1961. At this time, the collection was given an MS-Papers reference.

In the early 1980s the collection's worth was recognised by Sharon Dell¹² as "one of our jewels",¹³ and these 252 letters were separated out as a distinctive group with a new reference number. They were arranged into date order and placed into 18 folders. An index of names of the writers and those they wrote to, and place names were recorded in the paper inventory. This paper inventory was the main finding aid for the collection, and the collection was microfilmed as a part of a wider microfilming project in the 1980s. In ca. 1999, the top level description and 18 folder records went online via the Library's OPAC, and were in due course harvested into the National Library of New Zealand's federated website. Now, each letter has its own record with a scope and contents note and links to additional authorised terms which in the case of personal names, include biographical notes. Soon, there will be

a digital object attached, and potentially, future enhancement including transcription, translation, and ongoing additions to the descriptions as more is discovered about them.

So, this work has enriched communication of provenance and context as well as of each item's content, and has put it online. This means that when someone finds an image of a letter, it will be wrapped in a chain of meaning which makes it possible to put a lens over it at different points in time. Our goal is to ensure that this rich metadata is solidly founded within the digital environment.

Existing tools

We use two specific tools which have been developed for standardised authority control for Māori terms: 1) the Iwi-Hapū Names list,¹⁴ and 2) Ngā Ūpoko Tukutuku, or the Māori Subject Headings list, built using a Māori world view.¹⁵ These are both dynamic tools, available on the web, and their inclusion makes us part of a community of practice working towards wider acceptance and use of Māori terms for Māori materials.¹⁶

This data also includes thousands of names (for people, or 'entities', or 'agents', and for places), in shared authority lists within our A&D system. These terms get surfaced online, along with our associated notes on biography, context or hierarchy. There is substantial work ahead in disambiguating personal names, and in exploring the addition of geotagging to place names.

These terms are linked to descriptive records created within A&D's chief tool – TAPUHI (Turnbull Automated Project for Unpublished Heritage Items), which is the Library's in-house collection management system, first implemented for the Manuscripts section in 1991/2, then separately for the Photographic Archive and the Drawings Paintings and Prints accounts in 1992/3, and for the Oral History account in 1997/8. The system (except for Oral History), defaults to immediate online publication of all records, and mandates a top level description within a short time after accessioning. As a result, we can claim to have no backlogs in the Manuscripts section! However, for many collections there may be only a minimal top level description online, and it may be difficult for researchers (or indeed donors) to see whole collections. In addition, the data structure does not allow many links to assist connectedness to the online 'web of knowledge'.

Future development

However, the implications of speedy minimal description for a collection

like the 'Atkinson letters in Māori from Taranaki' may be that Māori assume that the letters are written by Atkinson and do not explore further (this was a perception that we needed to correct). Digitisation of the letters, and the associated item level metadata, are only one step towards improving access.

I argue that 'surfacing' material goes beyond simply more item description. One of the critical elements for 'surfacing' these days means to the internet, and that means thinking in IT terms. If our data isn't surfaced on the web in a structured way, to computers, it will not be available for the huge amount of creativity in this realm, including by Māori. For example, there are already digital repositories run by iwi. There are projects assessing the use of te reo in digitised newspapers; people are developing search tools generated from maps of pā and marae. Surfacing standards-based archival descriptive data into this open linked environment means that other people can find it and make it sing.

For me, pragmatically, this means using the standard designed to put A&D on the internet, EAD or Encoded Archival Data, along with its sister standard EAC or Encoded Archival Context.¹⁷ The A&D team has been exploring practice in this space through a project known as Hikitia (Uplift), and samples from the Taranaki letters collected by Atkinson have been encoded into EAD and EAC as part of a pilot study.¹⁸

Communicating all of these access points online, in a standardised way, makes it easier for Māori resources in the Library's unpublished collections to be found. Once found, whether by individuals or by IT tools, these primary resources can be used for all sorts of purposes. We may not see all of them immediately, so how can we measure success? One measure will be the extent to which specific tools like the Iwi/Hapū list and the Māori Subject Headings, which were intended to be dynamic and to continue to evolve, are taken up and contributed to by others in the archival and library descriptive community of practice. Another will be the connectedness of our future finding aids, achieved via standardised data. A third way will be through adding value to our data with enhancements suggested by the community. So, we will know we have succeeded by the number of new conversations we are having, even if they include the occasional wero, and by the evidence of vibrant and dynamic work using and re-using the collections.

Ariana: Relationship building is critical. In April 2012 I spoke at the ARANZ 'Taonga Tuku Iho' seminar about the work I had just started doing on the collection. Our Māori curator, Paul Diamond spoke about a

collection he was working on, of Māori portraits from the early 1840s. There was a good amount of interest from the archivists who were present that day.

A few weeks later, we were approached by Honiana Love who is an archivist who until recently worked for the community based organisation, Te Reo o Taranaki. They are focussed on revitalising their unique dialect of the Māori language from the Taranaki region.

Honiana confided in us that she had felt quite shocked that we had spoken about her ancestors without speaking to her or her iwi first. One of the portraits that Paul featured in his presentation at the ARANZ seminar was of her namesake Honiana Te Puni. Honiana said some memorable things that day, one of which was a reminder of the pain still felt by the Taranaki people by what happened to them in the wars. She said it was not 150 years ago to them. To them, "it happened yesterday".

After some discussion, Honiana offered to introduce us to iwi representatives. We met next with Honiana and Hemi Sundgren who works for the Taranaki Iwi Trust (and was then the chairperson of Te Reo o Taranaki). Hemi stressed the importance of building a quality relationship between the library and the Taranaki Māori community, who relate to the letters. This has been a work in progress ever since.

It has included collaborating on interpretation and labelling for one of the letters for an exhibition in our newly opened Turnbull Gallery. In August Paul Diamond and I visited Te Reo o Taranaki to talk about the letters. We also co-presented with Honiana at a public talk at Puke Ariki about the letters. The outcome of the meeting is that Te Reo o Taranaki want to engage with us, but this cannot replace engagement with iwi. We are seeking guidance on any potential issues surrounding cultural sensitivity of particular items before the digitised items go up on the internet, and Te Reo o Taranaki are offering to introduce us to iwi representatives. Ideally the project can become one of digital repatriation which could build upon a previous collaboration with Archives NZ and help them fulfil their mission to revitalise their unique dialect of Te Reo Māori.

Tribal historians like Hemi hold much of the rich cultural knowledge pertaining to such collections. Through being inclusive of decision making surrounding these letters, we are building up trust and look forward to working together more in the future and collaborating over helping to be able to interpret the letters better and to improve our descriptions and accuracy of our finding aids relating to them.

Our Conclusion

The next step is to build upon this relationship and in conjunction with the Taranaki community and others who relate to these letters, to put the digitised items up on line, so they can be utilised for future research.

We also hope to foster a reciprocal relationship, so, if we have mis-named someone in the Atkinson letters, we can expect that someone from Taranaki will tell us, and then we can correct the name, and its 'authority' version, note the source of the new information, and, in an ideal world, note that the finding aid bore the incorrect version for however long!

The title of this paper 'Titiro ki muri' literally translates as 'look back' which implies looking to the past to inform practice. In a Māori world view however, it is as if you are walking backwards into the future, whereby the past is in front of you.

So titiro ki muri (looking behind) can also refer to the need to look to the future. To keep future generations in mind in the work we do now. To make sure that we hand out as many keys as are needed for as many doors as there are taonga in our care.

Endnotes

1. Presentation to ARANZ Conference, Wellington, 2012.
2. Royal, C. *Turnbull Library Record*, 1990. p.33.
3. Internal Library report, Ref#439062, 27 July 2011.
4. See DNZB.
5. Clayworth, P. (2003). "A sort of scientific duty": A.S. Atkinson on race, civilization and the Māori. In *Turnbull Library Record*, 36, p.47.
6. Williams, H. W. (1992). *Dictionary of the Māori Language*. 7th ed. Wellington: GP Publications.
7. Goode, P. (2001). *The Kaingarara letters. The correspondence of Tamati Te Ito Ngamoke in the A. S. Atkinson Papers, 1857-1863* (Master's thesis, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand). Retrieved from http://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/bitstream/10092/4313/1/Thesis_fulltext.pdf
8. Ibid. 'The Kaingarara presence in Taranaki' [map].
9. Te Puni Kōkiri. (2012). *Te Kāhui Māngai: Directory of Iwi and Māori Organisations*. <http://www.tkm.govt.nz/>
10. Taranaki Regional Council (2012). *Iwi Contacts: Iwi boundaries*. <http://www.trc.govt.nz/iwi-contacts/>
11. Barrowman, R. (1995). *The Turnbull: a library and its world*. Auckland: Auckland University Press.
12. Sharon Dell was employed as the Turnbull's 'Māori Manuscripts Librarian' in 1979.
13. Alexander Turnbull Library Māori Manuscripts Librarian, working notes (unpublished). MS-Papers-6373. Draft NARTAM form for Atkinson Māori letters from Taranaki, with MS annotations by Sharon Dell (1983).
14. This was developed in 2001 by NLNZ, TRW and LIANZA, and is available from the NLNZ's website <http://iwi-hapu.natlib.govt.nz/iwi-hapu/>
15. This consists so far of 1471 preferred terms / subject headings of ca. 4019 terms in total, and it includes different dialects. These numbers were accurate as of March 2013. (Amey, C. personal communication, 15 March 2013). <http://mshupoko.natlib.govt.nz/mshupoko/index.htm>
16. Unfortunately, in order to facilitate the inclusion of these terms we need to run internal versions which, because our system does not support Unicode, are inconsistent with terms that include a macron, which (at least these days) can change the meaning of a word in Māori. By requiring support for unicode in our future systems, we will be able to be consistent with broader practice.
17. <http://www.loc.gov/ead/>; <http://eac.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/>
18. 'Project Hikitiā' (Uplift) is an in-house project to explore practice using EAD and EAC as a preliminary to replacing the TAPUHI system. It has involved the generous support of Daniel Pitti, who arranged for a free trial instance of ICA-AtoM. A&D team members have been experimenting with data from existing descriptions.