

HURIMOANA URUPĀ, WHAKATO ROAD

This unique urupā lies between Whakato Marae and Toko Toru Tapu Church. It has been extended during the past few decades to cater for inevitable use by whānau who choose to bury relatives beside their loved ones. It is the oldest and biggest urupā for Ngāti Maru, the largest hapū of Rongowhakaata.

Several reports have been made about the former burial crypt at Hurimoana that held the remains of noted ancestors in waka-shaped vessels. Meri Hape, later Mrs Woodbine Johnson, was about 14 when her grandfather Te Hau, a noted Ngāi Tamanuhiri warrior and chief, was buried in this crypt. A daughter of Tiopira and Maora Pani, she gave a full description, noting it was in some disrepair. By the early 1900s, the walls had caved in and the crypt had collapsed. The bones were removed. The people left it as it was and did not use this part again.¹

Meri and Woodbine Johnson's daughter Heni married Richard Randall Sherratt. The Sherratt family gave this page from The NZ Journal of Science and Technology, Vol. XIII, No. 2, p78, October 1931 to Rodney Faulkner, a later owner of Woodbine Johnson's Wairakaia property at Muriwai. It reads:

About six years ago, Mrs Woodbine Johnson, whose maiden name was Meri Tutira (sic) [actually Meri Hape], and who is a member of the Rongowhakaata tribe, supplied me with an interesting account of the once-famous building at Hurimoana, in which the bones of the great fighting chiefs of the district were deposited. As a young lady, Mrs Johnson had visited the houses in 1868 but even then it was past its best, for the timbers were rapidly rotting away.

Hurimoana was nine miles from the town now known to us as Gisborne. The house was more or less circular in shape, being about 50ft in circumference. Totara had been the only wood used in its erection. The roof was covered with large quantities of raupo. The only binding material used was aka, a bush tendril much stronger than flax fibre. Periodically, the house was visited by parties of Natives who, as soon as crevices appeared, stuffed them with feathers of pigeon, those of the breast only being used, the idea being to have the place perfectly air-tight. The outside of the house was carved.

Inside there were some thirty small compartments, in each of which there lay on the ground a closed chest made in the shape of a canoe. These burial chests were of two shapes. One kind had a curved head attached to one end after the manner of a war canoe, while the other kind was apparently more of the shape of a food bowl. These were regarded by the Natives as objects specifically manufactured for purpose of burial and averaged from 5ft to 8ft in length. My informant seemed quite certain that the shape suggested a canoe more than anything else.

The bones only were placed in the chests, and previous to the time of the grandfather of Mrs

Johnson at least five direct ancestors of her family had been buried there. This grandfather whose name was Tawheo Pohatu was seventy years ago the greatest fighting chief of the district. His great battles, in order, were Uawa, Maramatawhana, Torotoatara (near Te Aute College) and Te Pukenui (near Māhia Peninsula), the last two engagements being with the Ngatiporou.

A chief whose bones finally were placed in an ancestral burial-chest at Manutuke became most strictly tapu, and could seldom be removed therefrom. Tawheo was buried standing, as became so great a warrior. As the building fell gradually into disrepair, the bones of ancestors were removed to another spot. The highly tapu carvings connected with the buildings were never sold, but rotted away.

We are aware of the use of burial-chests in North Auckland, which remained secret until comparatively recently; and it seems certain that matters connected with burial-chests and customs were well guarded. There is today a cave at the entrance to a harbour in the north which contains wooden burial chests, but the secret of its existence has been so well-guarded that very few settlers have ever heard of it, while those who have attempted to find it have been turned back by the Māoris.



Whakato Marae, Manutuke.



Hurimoana, Manutuke.

¹ See also J A Mackay, *Historic Poverty Bay and the East Coast*, p375

Recent excavations near the Pyramid of Cairo have revealed a canoe-shaped vault in which lay the body of the Queen of Cheops. Originally, the canoe-shaped structure would be definitely associated with the worldwide idea of the journey which the spirit must make across water after death and the Māoris certainly had this idea. – The NZ Journal of Science and Technology, October 1931

I lived on the property beside Hurimoana urupā in the 1970s. I noted one day in the corner a gravestone of a European child, Sarah Jane Paxton, who died in 1885. Inquiries through the Anglican Church could only report she was a child of a visiting clergyman to the Mission Station Rev William Williams established at Whakato. The people agreed for her to be buried in the corner of Hurimoana. Adam Maynard, Mahoe Waihape and other kaumatua from Whakato Marae confirm the story that an American family contacted the marae about a burial in the Hurimoana urupā. The child buried there is a relative from their visiting missionary ancestors at that time.

In this same corner, I recall many old plinths had no or illegible writing on them. Sadly, several had fallen over and a couple had rolled down the bank.

Anaru Matete, the enigmatic colourful leader and early farmer during the troublesome period between 1850-1880s was buried in the old section of Hurimoana on 19 September 1890. Others buried there include Matete, Te Rito, Ratapu, Nepia, Swann/Waana, Dennis, Herewini, Brown, Nepe, Maynard, Tureia, Waihape, Edwards, Moeau, Farmer, Whitiri. This is not a complete list.

The urupā is very tidy with adequate water for visitor and whānau ablutions.



Hurimoana, Manutuke, with Whakato Marae in the distance.

KOHURAU CAVES; RAKAI A UE, WAINUI

The remains of the great rangatira Ruapani were laid in the sacred Koharau caves on an exposed site, at the tip of Maungarongo (Tuaheni). These caves have long since collapsed, having been eroded by the sea, but some people still know their general location.

Because Ruapani was interned here, Wainui is a recognised tribal pou. For the Te Ohu Kaimoana inshore fisheries settlement, this site is the northern point for Rongowhakaata and Te Aitanga a Mahaki claimants. Ngāti Porou claim the area from Potikirua to Te Toka a Taiau. This is still unresolved. Urupā that contain the remains of historical tipuna is important for many of us, hence this impasse.

Ingrid Searancke talked about the history of the Wainui Okitu area to journalist Gray Clapham. He recorded that the people of the area were the descendants of those who came on the Horouta waka 1350 AD. Tohunga chief Uenuku Whakarongo, who had connections with the spirit world, was dropped off at Wainui and established a whare korero house of learning at the base of Maungarongo.

A sacred burial place of these early Horouta people, known as the Koharau caves, also existed on Maungarongo. Here the bones of ancestors who came on the Horouta

waka from Hawaiki were hidden as sacred taonga. Such was the mana of these burial caves, Ruapani, Rakaiatane, Konohi and other notable tipuna were buried here.

The Turanga version is that Rakaiatane and his followers came from Whareongaonga.

Native Land Court records

WAINUI

