

# Notes and Communications

## *He Tohu*



LILLIE LE DORRÉ, ARCHIVES NEW ZEALAND

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

Many years of hard work culminated on 19 May 2017 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* (treasures) that shape Aotearoa/New Zealand:

- He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni – the Declaration of Independence of the United Tribes of New Zealand (1835);
- Te Tiriti o Waitangi – the Treaty of Waitangi (1840); and
- Te Petihana Whakamana Pōti Wahine – the Women’s Suffrage Petition (1893).

*He Tohu*, which is housed in a state-of-the-art conservation space that will see our fragile and irreplaceable documentary heritage preserved for future generations, is supported by an interpretive exhibition that provides on-site and online learning experiences and resources, particularly for New Zealanders between 10 and 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* thanks to a larger display space and extended opening hours. The exhibition will be in place for at least the next 25 years.<sup>1</sup>

1 *He Tohu* means “the signs,” and refers to the unique signatures or marks of those who supported these documents. For Māori, these *tohu* are sacred because those who signed have added their *mana* (prestige). *He Tohu* has three objectives:

- to preserve our fragile and invaluable documentary heritage for future generations;
- to improve access to these *taonga* for all New Zealanders and visitors to our country; and
- to enhance learning opportunities for young New Zealanders.

The new exhibition replaces the display of these documents in the Constitution Room at Archives New Zealand Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwanatanga. The exhibition’s three documents will remain under the statutory guardianship and care of Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwanatanga and its chief archivist.

For Archives New Zealand (Archives) and its staff, the new exhibition has been a focus for a number of years, with archivists Stefanie Lash and Jared Davidson working as the 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 journey and will continue in 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 this year in the build-up to the opening on 19 May: the closure of the Constitution Room on 11 April and the move of the taonga on 21 April.

### **Closure of the Constitution Room**

Prior to *He Tohu*, the three taonga, along with other constitutional documents, were housed in the Constitution Room, which was opened at Archives House in Wellington in 1990. Designed over 25 years ago, the Constitution Room was no longer fit for this purpose. It was necessary to close the room some weeks ahead of the move to allow the conservators time to prepare the documents for transfer to their new home. It was closed to the public on 7 April and, shortly after, a staff event was held for formal closure.

Organizing this event involved input from several Archives staff and required careful consideration of the appropriate *tikanga* (customary values and practices) for the occasion and location. Located on the shores of Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington Harbour), Archives' Wellington office functions under the *maru* (shelter/authority/safeguard) of Te Atiawa and Taranaki Whānui (Māori iwi/tribes with traditional bases in the Taranaki and Wellington regions of New Zealand). The *tikanga* of Te Atiawa and Taranaki Whānui therefore guide the organization.

The morning of 11 April began with a *karakia* (prayer), led by *kaumātua* (elder) Kura Moeahu. Staff filled the Constitution Room, tracing their hands over the document cases before singing Archives' *waiata* (song), "Te Manaaki Taonga." After *kai* (food) came the commencement of a *kawe mate*, 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, as well as to the *tīpuna* (ancestors) whose signatures and marks line the pages, as it is customarily used in places where the deceased was well known and loved but was not buried.

Throughout the *kawe mate*, a range of emotions were expressed – from laughter, as we were reminded 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 and document tables that make up part of the interpretive display wrapping around the document room. Rob Stevens, the project manager of *He Tohu*, then provided an update on the building and development of the exhibition.

A final karakia was said before long-serving archivist Tony Connell symbolically closed the door to the Constitution Room for the last time. Māori tikanga always conclude with a *hākari* or feast to lift *tapu* (sacred spiritual restriction) 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.

### **The Moving of the Taonga**

The three *He Tohu* taonga were moved between the Archives and National Library buildings in the early hours of 22 April. While this journey was only 200 metres, preparations had begun months in advance, involving staff from across Archives, the National Library, and the wider Department of Internal Affairs. This event included a *pōwhiri* (welcome ceremony) at Waiwhetu Marae in Lower Hutt, the procession itself, the ceremony inside the National Library, and kai at the Pipitea Marae. About 560 people participated in the event, again under 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 the incorporation of appropriate and meaningful tikanga that honoured the *mana* (prestige) of the taonga and those whose aspirations for the future are represented by their signatures and *moko* (marks). Several options were considered. The option chosen was to transport the taonga 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**

Because of the fragile nature of the taonga, care needed to be taken to ensure that they did not suffer any damage. Parchment is prone to shrinking and flexing outside of a controlled environment; any movement or vibration can cause iron gall ink (in this case, in the signatures) to crack and flake. Three large, weather-resistant wooden crates with internal cushioning were used. The crates were carried by a team of 22 Archives staff with training and experience in handling. The “crate crew” dedicated hours to practising for the event, and their

reverence set the tone for this historic occasion, an acknowledgement of the documents' mana.

A number of options were investigated for the vehicle to be used. While it is considered best practice to move high-value or fragile archives in a specialized vehicle that has air-ride suspension, in order to minimize the potential impact during long journeys, testing of the available options found that the best one 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* (a woman with the role of ceremonial calling) met inside Archives House with staff ahead of the 4 a.m. start, to be ready to lead the procession. A *pūtātara* (conch shell) heralded the start of the journey – the *kaikaranga* began her call and the crew members lifted the purpose-built crates housing the taonga. They slowly proceeded out the front door of Archives House to the specially adapted vehicle that awaited them. *Kaihoe* (waka paddlers) flanked 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, which has a long association with the Treaty of Waitangi, was included in procession; their Colour Guard tipped their flag to the taonga as they departed Archives and again during unloading at the National Library.

Once the procession was outside the National Library building, the *karanga* (ceremonial call) echoed out. The crate carriers entered first with the taonga, behind the *tohunga*. A *poi manu*<sup>2</sup> recitation was heard – this Parihaka 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* (pressed noses together in a greeting) and took their seats. *Wāhine* (women) sat on either side of the taonga, as is done during a *tangihanga* (funeral ceremony).

An ecumenical service of thanksgiving was held, followed by *whakatau* (greeting speeches) and *whaikōrero* (formal speeches) from kaumātua of *mana whenua* (local iwi) and iwi Māori. The speakers at the ceremony thanked

2 *Poi* is a traditional performance art and also refers to the equipment used to perform it. A *poi* is a light ball on a string of varying length which is swung or twirled rhythmically to sung accompaniment. *Poi manu* is the ceremonial application of *poi*.

Archives staff for the care given to the three taonga. They also recognized the importance of including the Women's 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: an organizational culture in which positive working relationships with Māori – promoting the principles of consultation, co-operation, and partnership – is 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 about and confident in *te ao Māori* (the Māori world) 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 also be seen in Archives' *waiata rōpū* (singing group), Ngā Manu Iere, which joined forces with the National Library waiata rōpū to support many of the speakers during the *He Tohu* taonga move and opening events. This commitment continues as various official parties make the pilgrimage to *He Tohu*.

The commitment to work within the spirit of Te Tiriti o Waitangi continues for Archives, despite the distance between our office and the taonga. Our *kaitiaki* (guardian) role endures, but in a different *whare* (house). 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.