

Appendix C: A continuum of community engagement around the site

The story of the SS *Ventnor* and the cultural values that surround it sit in a continuum of Chinese New Zealand history.

Immediately after the SS *Ventnor* sank in 1902, the then President of the Cheong Shing Tong, Kum Poy Sew Hoy, hired the steamship *Energy* to search for any remains.

The search was in vain, and from that point the community's link with the Hokianga was broken.

However, in later decades the story of the SS *Ventnor* was acknowledged, for example in Vanessa Sue's 1982 book on the Chinese of Christchurch and in Dr James Ng's pioneering research on the Chinese in Otago.



MR KUM POY SEW HOY,
The President of the Cheong Shin Tong or Burial Society, whose members in New Zealand number nearly 2500. The society provides funds for sending home the remains of deceased countrymen for interment in the family burial places in China.

WRECK OF THE VENTNOR. —♦— A MORTUARY VESSEL FOUN- DERS. — 500 BODIES LOST.

[FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT.]

AUCKLAND, Oct. 29.

The steamer *Ventnor*, from Wellington, bound to Hongkong, loaded with bodies of resurrected Chinese, struck Cape Egmont on Sunday night, and foundered off Hokianga. Two boats, with the officers and a part of the crew, have landed. The rest of the crew have been seen in two boats seven miles out. The steamer *Energy* has been sent to their assistance.

[PER PRESS ASSOCIATION.]

LATER.

The *Ventnor* had five hundred Chinese bodies and 6400 tons of coal on board. A special wire to the "Star" states that on

[Star \(Christchurch\)](#), 29

October 1902, p3

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Interest was renewed in 2007 when Wong Liu Shueng, then a Hokianga resident, was told about the areas in which the Chinese bones were buried. This initiated the revitalisation of knowledge around the *SS Ventnor*, the focus of which was her work on a short film on the *SS Ventnor*.

On March 1, 2009, the first delegation of Chinese community representatives met with Te Rarawa representatives at Mitimiti to discuss the *SS Ventnor* and the Chinese ancestors lost upon its sinking.



The first group of Chinese descendants visit Te Roroa's Matatina marae in the Waipoua forest. The group includes descendants of the Sew Hoy family who headed the Cheong Shing Tong, and members of the Poon Fah and Tung Jung Associations. March 2009.



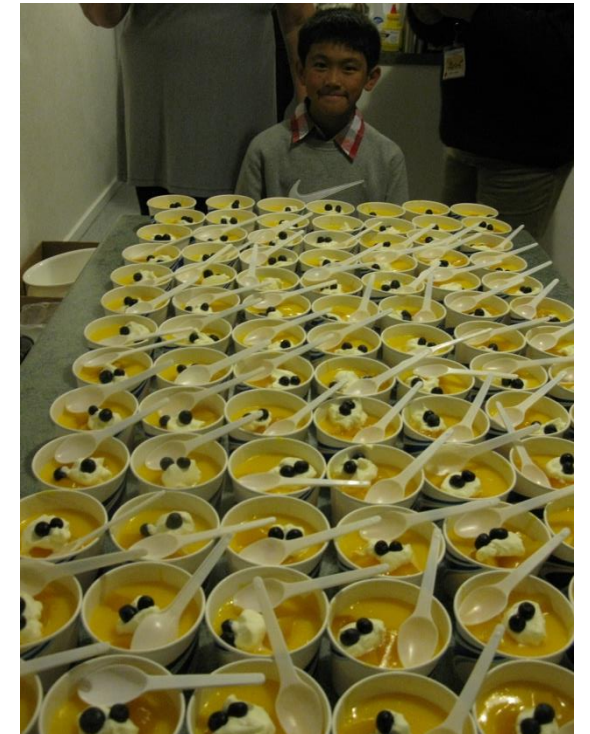
Alex Nathan, then Chair of Te Roroa Whatu Ora Trust with Wong Liu Shueng. Peter and Janice Sew Hoy stand in the background. March 2009, Matatina marae.

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In 2013, the community erected commemorative plaques at Te Roroa Visitors' Centre in Waipoua Forest and Maunga Hione urupā in Mitimiti.

The plaque at Waipoua was set in a grove of kauri, now accompanied by a donors' board, while the plaque at Maunga Hione was mounted on a memorial gate gifted by the hapū Te Tao Maui and Te Hokoheha of Mātihetihe marae.

Clockwise from top left: Charlie Ding President of the Poon Fah Assoc with the ancestral offerings; the unveiling of the Red Gate in Mitimiti; Fletcher Leung puts blueberries on puddings for the 80-plus attendees; Kirsten and June Wong at the unveiling of the plaque in Waipoua forest.



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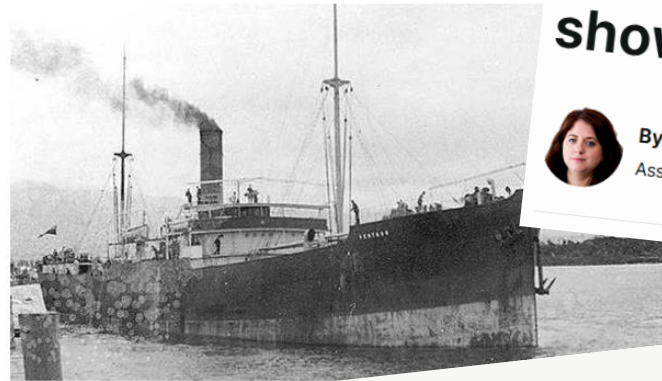
In 2014 the wreck was discovered by a private film and dive crew, which removed artefacts from the ship. The community successfully petitioned for the wreck to receive status as a protected archaeological site.

Media attention continued but the value of the *SS Ventnor* history to the descendant community was reflected in the swiftness and speed in which they responded with their concerns.

Shipwreck of SS Ventnor and its dead finally found

Shabnam Dastgheib

November 19, 2014 · 02:03pm



ILL-FATED TRIP: The SS Ventnor
General Section

Notification of Archaeological Site

8
MAY
2014

Notice is hereby given, under section 9(2) of the Historic Places Act 1993 ("the Act"), of the declaration by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust that the following site is an archaeological site as defined by section 2 of the Act:
The wreck site of the SS Ventnor located at 35°38'155"S, 173°13'589"E, south-west of the Hokianga Harbour

Outrage over 'lack of respect' shown to Ventnor shipwreck



By **Patrice Dougan**

Assistant Chief of Staff · NZME · 24 Nov, 2014 09:01 AM 3 mins to read

[Shipwreck of SS Ventnor and its dead finally found](#), *Stuff*, 19 November 2014

Appendix C: continued

In February 2015, the Buddhist monk Venerable Zhuji, from Baoguang Temple in Chengdu, China, performed a private blessing for those who were lost and who had died during the sinking, and the people of Te Roroa and Te Rarawa who care for the remains.

In April of the same year a large community group returned with guests, including the then Race Relations Commissioner Dame Susan Devoy.



Above: Venerable Zhuji performs blessings at the Red Gate memorial on Maunga Hione in Mitimiti, February 2015. Right: NZCA President Meng Foon with Dame Susan Devoy and Ying Foon at Mātihetihe Marae, Mitimiti.



Appendix C: continued

The next community visit to the Hokianga was in April 2018. By this time work was underway for a new NZCA-funded memorial at Rawene cemetery. Unfortunately, there was a breakdown in the construction process. A significant part of the 2018 visit was meeting with the Rawene community to hear their concerns.



Above: Meeting with the Rawene community at Rawene cemetery, April 2018, Right: ancestral offerings at Waipoua forest, April 2018.



Appendix C: continued

After six years of work, the NZCA's SS Ventnor memorial commemorating all those who died, was completed at the end of 2020.

Sited at the Manea Tapuwae Ā Nuku, Footprints of Kupe Centre in Ōpononi, the memorial was funded by the community and other public sources. It also received governmental Provincial Growth Funding.

The Chinese blessing occurred over the Ching Ming Festival in 2021.

Hundreds attended in torrential rain. The rain was considered a propitious sign of the ancestors' presence.

The memorial features all the names of those who were lost or died in the sinking.



Top left: the memorial featuring English Māori and Chinese, Bottom left: the ceremonial White Lion pays respects to the spirits, Right: the pou whenua Pāruru (place of shelter), gifted to the Chinese community by the iwi of the Hokianga.

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In February 2024 the NZCA took a new group of young people to the Hokianga and over to Treaty Groups to celebrate Waitangi day. The haerenga was named Pāruru, after the pou whenua gifted to NZCA.

The trip marked a generational change in the community's Ventnor story.



Above: Nathan Blundell and Jie Ying Cai performing 拜祭 baai3 zai3, Top right: the team refurbishing the Red Gate on Maunga Hione. Bottom right: Bobby Shen practices his whaikōrero at Waipoua forest, February 2024.

