



NEW ZEALAND CHINESE ASSOCIATION INC
紐西蘭華聯總會

The Wreck Site of the SS *Ventnor* and its Immediate Surrounds

Nomination for the New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangī Kōrero

Submitted by the New Zealand Chinese Association

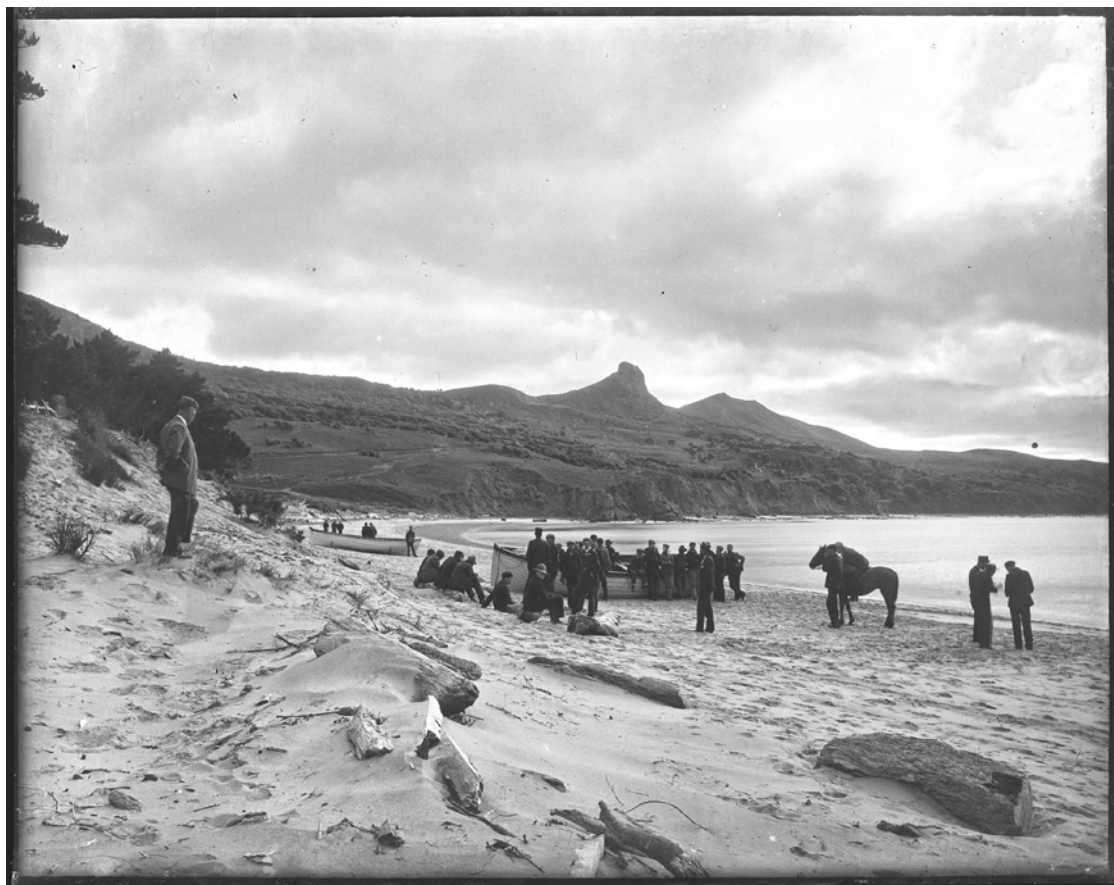
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View from Hokianga looking out to the wreck site of the SS Ventnor in the Tasman Sea. (Chris Bing)

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Dawes, Charles Peet, 1867-1947. Bracey, O M (Mrs) :Two lifeboats from the steamer "Ventnor" on Ōmāpere Beach photographed by Charles Peet Dawes. Ref: PAColl-5312. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <https://natlib.govt.nz/records/22840844>

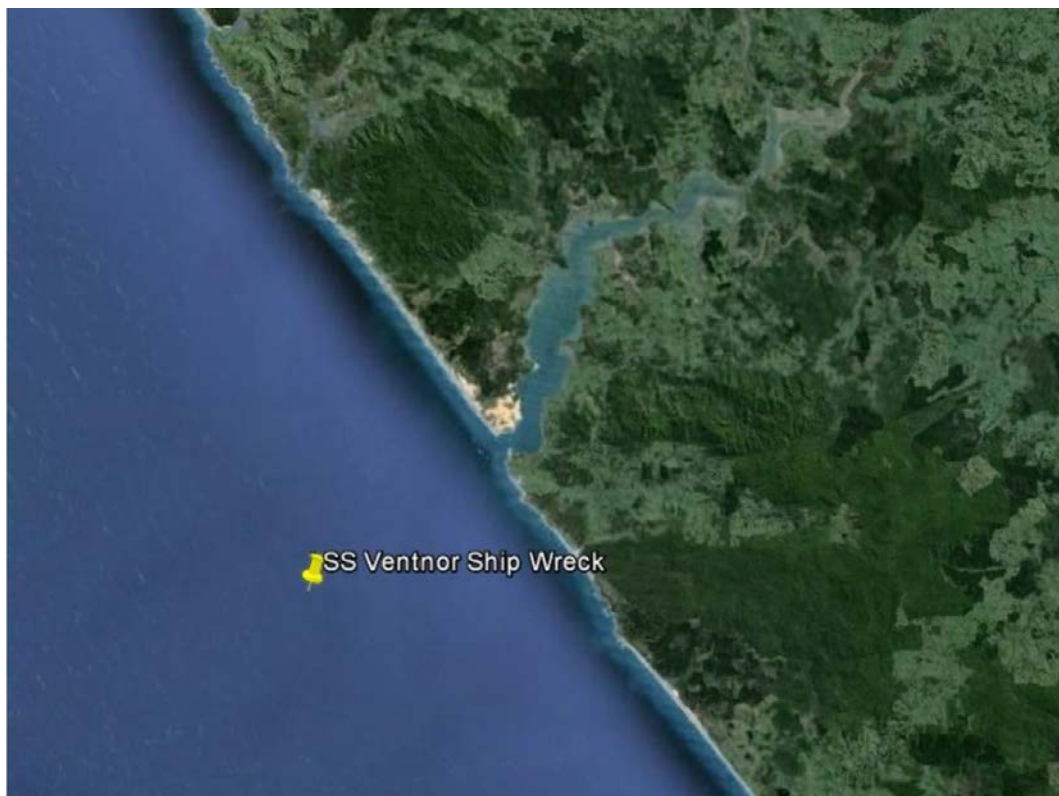
1.What is the Name of the Place?

The wreck site of the SS *Ventnor* and its immediate surrounds.

2.Where is the Place?

The site of the shipwreck of the SS *Ventnor* is located approximately 15km southwest of the opening to the Hokianga Harbour within at least 150m of water. Heritage New Zealand has been supplied with the map reference of 35° 38' 155" S, 173° 15' 589" E by a professional diver who has visited the wreck site. The archaeological site designation is a 500-metre circle around this reference.¹

The NZAA site record for the *Ventnor* is O06/786 (previously recorded as O05/350), available on ArchSite.



*The specific location of the SS Ventnor shipwreck site in relation to Hokianga Harbour (source: Edwards, B. and Jamieson, B. 2014. "Archaeological Assessment of the SS Ventnor Ship Wreck: Hokianga Harbour mouth NZAA Site No: O05/350." Northland Regional Council.
<https://www.nrc.govt.nz/media/uulctuhe/ss-ventnor-assessment-sheet.pdf>)*

¹ Notification of Archaeological Site. 2014. New Zealand Gazette Office, Government Information Services, Department of Internal Affairs. <https://gazette.govt.nz/notice/id/2014-gs2773>

3.What is the Legal Description of the Place?

Not applicable as the site is at sea.

4.Who Owns the Place?

Crown property under the jurisdiction of Maritime New Zealand.

5.Who Might be Interested in the Place?

Those with stakeholder interests in the site include:

- Chinese New Zealand descendants of those involved in the SS *Ventnor* venture. Specifically, the:
 - Sew Hoy family (Poon Yue)
 - Descendants of Choie Sew Hoy 徐肇開 whose body was lost in the sinking and who headed the Cheong Shing Tong 昌善堂 repatriation organisation
 - Ng / Wu family (Jung Seng)
 - Descendants of Ng Jor Ching 吳佐清 whose body was lost in the sinking
 - Poon Fah Association of NZ Inc (1916) 新西蘭番花會館
 - The organisation that inherited the funds of the Cheong Shing Tong - the original organising group - when it closed down. Along with the funds, the Poon Fah Association inherited the remainder of the Cheong Shing Tong's work.
 - Today, the Poon Fah Association represents the village kinfolk from Poon Yue and Fah Yuen counties² who were on board the *Ventnor* and whose descendants we have not been able to identify.

² The majority of early settler Chinese were from the Pearl River Delta area surrounding the city of Guangzhou (formerly Canton) in Guangdong province. The names of the associations are based on the origin counties, which differ from the modern districts.

- Tung Jung Association of NZ Inc (1926) 新西蘭東增會館
 - The organisation representing the village kinfolk from Jung Seng county whose exhumation and repatriation from Wellington was arranged by Chan Fook On 陳福安, and whose descendants we have not been able to identify.
- Descendants of Te Roroa, Te Rarawa and others who continue to care for the remains and whose ancestors were involved in the care.

There are also others who have high levels of interest and engagement including:

- Chinese New Zealanders who see the history as a cornerstone of their collective history.
- Peoples of the Hokianga district for whom the *Ventnor* has special historical and ancestral meaning.

We note that the *Ventnor* history has become an emblematic Chinese and Chinese-Māori story in the broader New Zealand narrative. As such we believe it would be of general interest to a wider New Zealand audience.

6. Who Have You Consulted About Your Application?

NZCA – Mandate on Behalf of the Chinese Descendants

The New Zealand Chinese Association (NZCA) represents the descendants of those lost on the SS *Ventnor* and the descendant organisations that originally organised or were part of the *Ventnor* shipment in 1902. (See *Question 5 Who might be interested in this place?* for more detail.) The NZCA established a subcommittee in 2015 to oversee *Ventnor*-related matters. The NZCA regularly consults descendants and organisations to ensure that the mandate is still valid.

The NZCA is directly responsible for:

- formal relationships with Te Hua o te Kawariki Trust / Manea Tapuwae ā Nuku Footprints of Kupe, Te Roroa Whatu Ora and Mana Whenua Trust Boards, Mātihetihe marae (Te Rarawa) and future relationships, if any, with those who have a historical connection with the care of remains from the *Ventnor* that washed up;
- the memorial at Manea Tapuwae ā Nuku Footprints of Kupe;

- formal relationships with Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga regarding the wreck site and its protections, and various pieces of education work;
- formal relationships with the Ministry of Culture and Heritage Manatū Taonga and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa regarding the artefacts from the *Ventnor*; and
- extending and promoting the story and history to future generations and to the wider public.

Alongside our iwi partners, the NZCA has moral guardianship and story sovereignty over the history and the narratives around it and the post-2007 events.

Direct Consultation

For this application the NZCA has specifically consulted:

From the Chinese side:

- Chinese New Zealand descendants³ of those involved in the SS *Ventnor* venture:
 - The Sew Hoy family (Poon Yue)
 - Descendants of Choie Sew Hoy 徐肇開 whose body was lost in the sinking and who headed the Cheong Shing Tong 昌善堂 repatriation organisation.
 - The Ng / Wu family (Jung Seng)
 - Descendants of Ng Jor Ching 吳佐清 whose body was lost in the sinking.
 - The Poon Fah Association of NZ Inc (1916) 新西蘭番花會館
 - The organisation that inherited the funds of the Cheong Shing Tong when it closed down. Along with the funds, the Poon Fah Association inherited the remainder of the Cheong Shing Tong's work.
 - Today, the Poon Fah Association represents the village kinfolk from Poon Yue and Fah Yuen counties who were on board the *Ventnor* and whose descendants we have not been able to identify.
 - The Tung Jung Association of NZ Inc (1926) 新西蘭東增會館
 - The organisation representing the village kinfolk from Jung Seng county whose exhumation and repatriation from Wellington was

³ Descendants of the Sew Hoy and Ng/Wu families now number in their hundreds. The NZCA works with family-appointed representatives.

arranged by Chan Fook On 陳福安, and whose descendants we have not been able to identify.

From the Tangata Whenua side:

- Te Roroa Whatu Ora and Mana Whenua Trust Boards
- Mātihetihe marae committee
- Te Hua o te Kawariki Trust

Copies of the responses are provided in Appendix A.

Consultation Survey

A survey to evidence community support for the listing of the SS *Ventnor* wreck and wreck site as a Category 1 Historic Place on the New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangi Kōrero was undertaken over a ten-week period beginning 20 June 2025. It was promoted as an invitation to show community support for the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga listing application. This invitation was shared through Chinese early settler descendant groups, via the national and regional Chinese Association network, with an invitation to share the survey with friends and allies including associated iwi.

The survey report and detailed findings are provided in Appendix B.

Key findings at a glance. There were 227 respondents to the survey endorsing the statement “I support the New Zealand Chinese Association application to have the SS *Ventnor* wreck and wreck site placed on the New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangi Kōrero.”

The findings evidence the wide breadth, depth and character of support within and across the communities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

- Endorsements were received across all regions of Aotearoa New Zealand except Te Tairāwhiti and from 13 New Zealanders living overseas (Australia, the United States, Singapore and the Netherlands).
- Respondents spanned the full age range from those aged 11-14 years to 75 years and over.
- Most respondents (80.2%) identified as Chinese, with just under two thirds (62.1%) from the early settler Chinese New Zealand community — the descendant community most directly connected to the kōiwi aboard the SS *Ventnor*.
- Among the early settler Chinese respondents, most (78.0%) trace whakapapa to one or more of the three counties most represented by the kōiwi aboard the

Ventnor — Poon Yue 番禺, Fah Yuen 花縣, and Jung Seng 增城 demonstrating continuing whakapapa significance.

- Twenty respondents (8.8%) identified as Māori, of whom 14 have whakapapa to the Hokianga — the iwi rohe where the kōiwi came ashore and were cared for.
- There were 47 respondents (20.7%) who identified as New Zealand European and 20 (8.8%) who selected “Other” ethnicity and specified a diverse range of ethnic identities evidencing cross-community support beyond descendant communities.

Beyond ethnic ancestry and whakapapa, respondents described a wide range of connections to the SS *Ventnor* kaupapa and legacy. The breadth of these connections demonstrates that the *Ventnor* kaupapa is actively held, carried and transmitted across cultural, intellectual and creative life in Aotearoa.

These included historians and archaeologists researching Chinese New Zealand history, and artists, authors, and filmmakers who use the narrative to explore cultural identity. Additionally, educators and community organisers have kept the history alive through engaging with the school curriculum, educational trips and pilgrimages reflecting a story that is increasingly deeply integrated into New Zealand's cultural landscape.

Respondent voices present deeply personal accounts of whakapapa, manaakitanga, kaitiakitanga and grief with strong calls for the protection of the SS *Ventnor* wreck and site as a wāhi tapu and gravesite. Key themes are summarised below.

Cultural, spiritual, social and traditional significance

That the SS *Ventnor* wreck and site is held as a wāhi tapu and gravesite and that its cultural significance is shared and sustained across two distinct descendant communities. It embodies a more-than-century-old Māori–Chinese relationship that is contemporary and lived.

Importance to tangata whenua

Testimony from respondents with Hokianga whakapapa, including descendants of the marae and communities that cared for the kōiwi, evidences a place of continuing importance to tangata whenua.

Community association with, and public esteem for, the place

Responses show that the SS *Ventnor* wreck and site is actively shaping community identity, belonging and intergenerational connection in 2025.

**Importance in NZ history
with symbolic and
commemorative value**

Respondents articulate the SS *Ventnor* wreck and site as the focus of remembrance for the 13 who died, the 499 lost, the Chinese communities that organised the venture, and the iwi who cared for the kōiwi.

**Potential for public
education**

Respondents emphasise the value and importance of including the kaupapa in the NZ school curriculum. The breadth of existing creative, scholarly and educational work evidences a place already actively shaping public understanding.

The survey provides clear evidence of the contemporary cultural, historical, spiritual, social and traditional significance of the SS *Ventnor* wreck and site to descendant communities, iwi partners and allied audiences in Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas.

Previous Related Consultation

Prior to 2020 it had been generally agreed by the descendant stakeholders that the remains should be left to rest where they are, whether at sea or on land. In 2020 there were indications that some were interested in exploring the idea of returning the kōiwi/remains to China. This prompted the NZCA to consult with the Poon Fah and Tung Jung Associations and representatives of the Sew Hoy and Ng/Wu families. The consensus was that the remains should be left to rest and not be disturbed or returned to China. The consultation also reconfirmed that the NZCA continues to speak for the descendants.

7. What Are Your Aims in Applying for Entry on The List?

We would like the SS *Ventnor* wreck site and its history to be formally recognised as a Category 1 Historic Place on the New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangī Kōrero.

Within Chinese communities of different migration waves, the legacy of the *Ventnor* has created space for people to come together and reflect on what it means to be a Chinese New Zealander. This is done not only through cultural practices, both traditional and reimagined; but also through encounters and connections with the people of Te Rarawa

and Te Roroa, and the land on which these histories occurred. These connections to our past, the people and the land are at the heart of our *Ventnor* work.

The fact that the bones | kōiwi are here in this land and in this sea, is a powerful symbol of our own belonging in Aotearoa New Zealand. Having the *Ventnor* wreck site listed as a Category 1 Historic Place would recognise this symbolism and anchor our work in the place where this part of the story started.

The recognition would underscore the cultural value of the site, as well as the value of Chinese New Zealand history and its importance to New Zealand's national narrative. This official recognition would also formalise the current understanding of the site as a place symbolic of events that have and continue to shape the relationship between Māori and Chinese.

A Category 1 listing will give extra weight and visibility to this history, encouraging more educational work that focuses on the *Ventnor* history and its values. Including the *Ventnor* wreck on the New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangī Kōrero could also support future applications for site protection under the Resource Management Act, as the site is currently at risk due to trawling.

8. How Does Your Place Compare with Other Similar Places?

Sites of Significance to Chinese

We believe that this site is distinctive amongst locations associated with Chinese in New Zealand. The *Ventnor* is situated in the network of Chinese sites on the New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangī Kōrero as a historical juncture between the gold seeking era and the experience of early Chinese, and the later permanent settlement of Chinese in Aotearoa New Zealand. There is no other site in Aotearoa New Zealand that is associated with such a breadth of Chinese New Zealand history and contemporary New Zealand resonance.

The following sites represent the early period of Chinese settlement associated with gold seeking:

- Lawrence Chinese Camp,
- Lawrence Chinese Graves Historic Area,
- Arrowtown Chinese Settlement,
- Sew Hoy's Gold Workings and Water Race System,

- Sew Hoy's Big Beach Claim Historic Area, and
- Sew Hoy's Building (Former)

Collectively, these sites show how Chinese lived, worked, thrived and died in New Zealand, participating in the gold economy of Otago and the West Coast and sending money back to family in China. Most of the men whose remains were being transported on the *Ventnor* were gold seekers.

Historically, the *Ventnor* shipment was the last of its kind in New Zealand. Large-scale repatriation of Chinese remains was suspended after the *Ventnor* sinking, although some individuals and families continued to send remains back to home villages.

A recent addition to the New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangī Kōrero is the Ng King Brothers Chinese Market Garden Settlement in Ashburton. This is an example of the settlement of Chinese, and contribution to and integration into New Zealand community. It symbolises the phase of Chinese New Zealand history following that represented by the *Ventnor*.

The location of the *Ventnor* wreck site is distinctive geographically in a Chinese New Zealand context. Most sites of significance to Chinese are located in the South Island, where the early Chinese were concentrated. Being in Northland, the *Ventnor* is in an area where historically few Chinese settled. However, the care of remains by Te Rarawa and Te Roroa over the course of a century has imbued the *Ventnor* wreck with a cultural significance to local Māori and a social significance to contemporary Chinese New Zealanders, many of whom have travelled to Northland to visit *Ventnor* locations and pay respects.

Shipwrecks

Five shipwreck sites are included in the New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangī Kōrero: the *Hydrabad* (1865-1878) Wreck Site (Levin), PS *Tasmanian Maid* Wreck Site (New Plymouth), the SS *Alexandra* Wreck Site (north Taranaki), the SS *Tararua* Wreck Site (Southland), and the SS *Victory* Wreck Site (Otago Peninsula). The SS *Ventnor* wreck site represents a different archaeological, historical and cultural heritage. The *Ventnor* is a more modern vessel and the wreck is further out to sea. A listing would add to the diversity of New Zealand's maritime heritage in the New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangī Kōrero.

9. Why Do You Think it's Important?

The *Ventnor* wreck site is important because it is the centre of a much larger history that spans from the gold mining era to the present day. We believe this site is a place of outstanding heritage significance through the values of cultural, social, spiritual, archaeological⁴ and historical significance.

Cultural, Social and Spiritual Significance

Traditional Burial Beliefs. The evidence of ancestor workshop in China dates back to the neolithic Yangshao period (5000 – 3000 BCE).⁵ From these very early times, practices of ancestor worship have been a central and unifying feature of Chinese culture.⁶ Key concepts included the idea that the dead can influence the welfare of the living, and that the spirits of the deceased needed to be attended to through offerings of incense and food. Ideally these offerings were made by male descendants.

The early Chinese gold seekers who arrived in New Zealand from 1865 also held these views as a central part of their worldview. It was therefore a matter of great concern that the Chinese who passed away in New Zealand were prevented from receiving the offerings that could be provided by their sons and families in China.

It was in this context that early Chinese leaders such as Choie Sew Hoy 徐肇開,⁷ set up a society to return the bones of fellow county folk back to their home villages. The Cheong Shing Tong 昌善堂 (or “Efulgent Goodness Board” as translated by the Reverend Alexander Don⁸) had its roots in Lawrence Chinese Camp,⁹ the first large Chinese settlement in New Zealand. Residents from the Poon Yue county erected their own clubhouse in 1869. As noted by Jenny Sew Hoy Agnew and Trevor Agnew in *Merchant Miner Mandarin: the Life and Times of the Remarkable Choie Sew Hoy*:

⁴ There is much archaeological potential for the *Ventnor* wreck. However, as the site contains ancestral remains, any application for an archaeological authority permit would require consultation with, and the consent of, the range of descendant stakeholders.

⁵ Lakos, William. 2010. *Chinese Ancestor Worship: A Practice and Ritual Oriented Approach to Understanding Chinese Culture*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, p13

⁶ Tavor, Ori. 2023. *Ancestor Worship*, edited by Chris Shei & Zhouxiang Lu. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367565152-RECHS10-1>

⁷ Historic places and a historic area in Otago and Southland are associated with Choie Sew Hoy.

⁸ Ng, James. 1993. *Windows on a Chinese Past*, v1, Otago Heritage Books, p.66

⁹ Lawrence Chinese Camp is a Category 1 Historic Place

“This was a gathering place for the men . . . who saw the need to co-operate in creating a structured welfare and burial society of the kind they had seen overseas. The organisation emerged as the Cheong Shing Tong”¹⁰

At the time, the Cheong Shing Tong’s work was broadly charitable. It helped members in times of hardship, including sending the elderly and infirm back to China.¹¹ It also contributed in the wider community, donating generously to local hospitals.¹²

Today, however, the Cheong Shing Tong is most known as a burial society. The cultural and spiritual significance of its work is reflected in this call for donations translated by Rev Alexander Don in 1883.¹³ The key underlying concepts are:

1. that there is a two-way exchange of influences between the land of the living and the land of the dead, and a relationship of care between the two; and
2. that proper self-conduct is based on virtue, which if cultivated leads to a good karmic foundation and blessings for the whole family and clan.

An excerpt from the Effulgent Goodness Board Rules [Cheong Shing Tong] (translated 1883)¹⁴

We hear that, generally speaking, through the great virtue of the Sages, beneficial influences extend to the shades; and through the deep benevolence of the Superior Men, favours flow to the most distant tombs; but the breast of the benevolent man is moved with compassion for fear that the wandering souls of the dead should famish.

We, the publishers, village-gentry of the district of Panyu [Poon Yue], pity those sojourning coffins not returned home, and regret the uneasiness of those scattered souls.

¹⁰ The clubhouse, which has now been restored and replaced on its original site in Lawrence, has more often been referred to as a “joss house” or temple. While it did have these functions the two-roomed house was more often used as a gathering place or community hall. Sew Hoy Agnew, Jenny and Agnew, Trevor. 2020. *Merchant, Miner Mandarin: the Life and Times of the Remarkable Choie Sew Hoy*, Canterbury University Press, pp 219-220

¹¹ Ng, James. 1993. *Windows on a Chinese Past*, v1. Otago Heritage Books, p.66

¹² Kumara Times, Volume XXVI, Issue 3831, 19 February 1889, p.2, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/KUMAT18890219.2.5>

¹³ The funds would have been for the Cheong Shing Tong’s first repatriation venture in 1883, in which they commissioned the SS *Hoihow* to return 230 sets of remains back to home villages. James Ng notes that the call for subscriptions may have gone out as early as 1880. (Ng, James. 1993. *Windows on a Chinese Past*, v1. Otago Heritage Books, p.81)

¹⁴ *ibid*

And there rests on us a duty imperative, on us fellow-villagers and fellow-sojourners: then how can we endure to sit on one side and look on?

But it is difficult for one man to bear such a heavy burden: the strength of many people is able to accomplish the good work.

Therefore together we have deliberated over the public-spirited proposal to transport these sojourning coffins back to Kwangtung: so let all open their purses of gold to aid the compassionate vessel to cross over¹⁵

Those who lay up virtue have a foundation, so let all proceed and bear the good fruits of the 1,000 families, in doing good lies the greatest happiness, so let all bestow one drop from the willow branch.¹⁶

Each man should regard virtue as devolving on himself, the performance of which he may not yield to another. Strive to be first with your subscriptions in aid: we are waiting for you to see what is right and do it: in paying taxes men fear to be last.

This excerpt from the Cheong Shing Tong rules highlights the traditional worldview and strong sense of public good in the early settler Chinese community. Many of the themes in these rules reference folk beliefs influenced by Buddhist and Taoist values, including beliefs that neglecting the ancestors can lead to them becoming hungry ghosts. Confucian philosophy also calls for ancestral veneration and rites. In general, local spiritual practices denoted the particular rites and forms of care, although there was general agreement that the care was best performed by family, usually in one's ancestral village.

After the sinking of the *Ventnor* in 1902, the Cheong Shing Tong's remaining funds and functions were passed on to the Poon Yue Association, which later became the Poon Fah Association. For many years afterwards, the names of Cheong Shing Tong and the successor groups were used interchangeably.¹⁷

The Poon Fah Association continues to uphold many of the traditional ancestral rites, as do other county groups such as the Tung Jung and Seyip associations, and early settler Chinese families across New Zealand. Key traditions include observing Ching

¹⁵ This is a double reference to the ship that will carry the remains of the dead home, and to Guanyin the Buddhist Bodhisattva of Compassion (觀世音菩薩 gun1 sai3 jam1 pou4 saat3) who was also worshipped in Chinese folk traditions. She is often depicted with a vase and willow branch, spreading the nectar of compassion.

¹⁶ See reference above.

¹⁷ Ng, James. 1993. *Windows on a Chinese Past*, v1. Otago Heritage Books, p.77

Ming and Chung Yeung by visiting their cemeteries and paying respects to ancestors through ritual offerings of food and incense: 拜神 (baai3 san4) or 拜祭 (baai3 zai3).¹⁸

Although it is less likely that people today believe in the concept of hungry ghosts, there is a general consensus that it is important to be connected to the traditions that are a core part of our family identities and heritage. This includes 拜神 (baai3 san4) and 拜祭 (baai3 zai3).



The Tung Jung Association's October 2022 Chung Yeung 重陽節 (Cung4 Joeng4 Zit3) commemorations at the Tung Jung ancestral memorial in Karori Cemetery, Wellington.

Tradition and Meaning in the Modern World. Connections to tradition and heritage are central to the New Zealand Chinese Association's work. However, the *Ventnor* work has been a real opportunity to reaffirm traditions, especially among young

¹⁸ Traditionally, baai3 saan1 involves a grave and is performed by male descendants / family members for a common ancestor. Conversely, baai3 zai3 is worship that can be completed for non-family, deities, hungry ghosts, or by family at a location other than a grave, such as a temple or memorial.

people. It's also been a prompt to revisit spiritual relationships and ceremonies for ancestral care.

Traditionally, the main form of ancestral care would be done by male descendants. But because we know the descendants of only two of the 499 ancestors lost, the Chinese New Zealand community – through the NZCA – has taken responsibility for their care.

This act of care is especially resonant because 1) it is a way of remembering and caring for all the early Chinese who struggled and were forgotten, and 2) it is a way for all Chinese New Zealanders to feel they are at home and connected to this land and its history. Since the modern rediscovery in 2007, community members have consistently performed 拜祭 (baai3 zai3) on every trip to the Hokianga. This is significant for young people, many of whom have not grown up with these traditional practices. It has not only brought them together but also enabled the creation of contemporary meaning based on ancestral spiritual traditions and cultural reclamation.

Importance of the SS *Ventnor* to the Chinese Community. The emotional resonance of this story for contemporary Chinese New Zealanders and others cannot be underestimated. For the descendants of those who were historically alienated, this history speaks loudly of inclusion and acceptance. Its message is one of both validation and home coming.

A testament to the power of this history lies in the number of creative works produced over the last decade, and the ongoing connections between Māori and Chinese. Some of the works the *Ventnor* has inspired have been large scale – such as Renee Liang's *The Bone Feeder* play and opera, and Lisa Reihana's *DigiRadiance—GOLD_LEAD_WOOD_COAL* recently shown at Tai Kwun gallery in Hong Kong.¹⁹ Others have been more community based, bringing together Chinese and Māori artists to explore common ground.²⁰

There are few Chinese now living in the Hokianga district near the *Ventnor* wreck. However, hundreds of Chinese New Zealanders and friends have made pilgrimages through NZCA organised trips, or independently with their families, to look out to the wreck location in the Tasman Sea and to pay their respects at the memorials for the *Ventnor* (as described through Appendix C).

¹⁹ <https://ocula.com/magazine/insights/unmissable-lisa-reihana-at-tai-kwun-hong-kong/>

²⁰ Chen, Liu. 14 January 2025. *Chinese and Māori artists unite to remember Hokianga wreck*, Radio New Zealand. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/chinese/538954/chinese-and-maori-artists-unite-to-remember-hokianga-wreck>

The spiritual and cultural narrative around the SS *Ventnor* has been inherited by successive generations of New Zealand Chinese, with New Zealand Chinese youth of today continuing to participate in and guard this narrative.²¹

Archaeological Significance

The SS *Ventnor* encompasses the unique intersection of maritime disaster and Chinese cultural history in Aotearoa New Zealand and is the only known shipwreck in New Zealand waters containing Chinese miners' remains. Although this is one of very few sites that could provide significant archaeological evidence around practices of burial repatriation from New Zealand, any exploration would need to be carefully considered and performed in consultation with the descendants of the *Ventnor* deceased and their representatives, owing to the presence of ancestral remains. Non-invasive investigation may be possible, but the NZCA is unlikely to support invasive archaeological investigations.

The wreck of the *Ventnor* and the surrounding area contain human remains and substantial material remains. This includes maritime equipment, the ship's structure, cargo (including Westport coal), and possibly funerary items. Five objects were retrieved from the wreck in 2014: a ceramic plate, the ship's bell, a lamp holder, a porthole and the ship's telegraph. The latter four are currently undergoing conservation treatment at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

Historical Significance

The historical narrative of the *Ventnor* sinking is described in *Q14 What is the history of this place?* and other sections of this submission. The historical themes represented by the *Ventnor* include:

Representing the role of the Chinese in New Zealand's gold mining era.

Between 1871 and 1885, Chinese comprised 40% of the total Otago goldfields population.²² Their labour helped support Otago's gold-dependent economy well into the mid 1880s when gold became hard to win.

During this time and well into the 20th century, Chinese were the largest visible ethnic minority, excluding Māori. In the 1881 Census, Chinese represented 1% of the total New Zealand population.²³ The decline of gold also saw a decline in New Zealand's

²¹ <https://www.paruru.nz>

²² Sourced from data: Ng, James. 1993. *Windows on a Chinese Past*, v1. Otago Heritage Books, p 156

²³ 1881 Census https://www3.stats.govt.nz/historic_publications/1881-census/1881-results-census.html#idpart_1_4381

Chinese population and the end of a significant era in Chinese and New Zealand history.

The majority of the remains on the *Ventnor* were of former gold seekers, most of whom never intended to stay in New Zealand. Their ill-fated return marks the final conclusion of the Chinese gold-seeking period. From this point, there were fewer attempts to repatriate remains as the new wave of post-gold migrants were engaged in safer forms of work and had greater incomes.²⁴

Insight into the cultural values and social structure of the early Chinese New Zealand community. The Chinese gold seekers were highly organised both in terms of community support and in terms of their global connections to China and the wider Chinese diaspora, particularly relating to commerce. The *Ventnor* enterprise was of a significant scale: 2,500 Chinese contributed 5000 pounds; the 499 sets of remains were uplifted from across both the South and North Islands; and the *Ventnor* shipment was twice the size of the previous repatriation in 1883. The enterprise reflects the cultural values of early Chinese in New Zealand, and its highly organised social structure.

Insights into the different responses to Chinese in New Zealand, and experiences of racism and acceptance The *Ventnor* history is marked by highly varied inter-cultural encounters. Many colonial New Zealanders found it extremely difficult to understand why the Chinese remains were being exhumed - while at the same time excluding those remains from being buried within the boundaries of public cemeteries. Where exhumations were organised, public reporting was detailed and there were invariably strong protests in local papers. These captured some of the colonial-era social and racial attitudes towards Chinese.²⁵ The *Ventnor* history is a window into exploring cultural contrasts.

²⁴ Ng, James. 1993. *Windows on a Chinese Past*, v1. Otago Heritage Books, p.69

²⁵ The Otago Taphophile blog has a compilation of historical newspaper stories that illustrate attitudes to the disinterment of Chinese remains: <https://otagotaphophile.blogspot.com/2024/05/the-chinese-ressurrectionists-and-ss.html?m=0>

10. Can You Make a Case for Entry on The List as a Category 1 Historic Place?

YES

The SS *Ventnor* wreck holds a distinctive and significant place in New Zealand's historical and cultural landscape that meets many of the criteria for Category 1 historic places. The NZCA's *Ventnor* work since 2007 has covered a broader range of physical sites, including the shipwreck, surrounding areas, and memorial sites around the Hokianga. This work around the sites and its historic resonance have made the *Ventnor* history a cultural touchstone and a point of cross-cultural connection, especially between Māori and Chinese. It is an ongoing source of community engagement and is a platform for education and understanding. There is a living heritage that surrounds the *Ventnor*, as it is a foundation for contemporary relationships, and it influences current understanding of New Zealand's multicultural identity. It continues to be significant for contemporary Chinese New Zealanders, including descendants of those on the *Ventnor*, early settler descendants, and newer migrants, continuing to demonstrate ongoing cultural practices, both traditional and reimagined.

Criteria (a) and (k).²⁶ The story of the *Ventnor* has a national historical significance and a broad geographical and temporal reach. As discussed in Q8 *How does your place compare with other similar places?*, the *Ventnor* is part of a network of sites that are significant to Chinese New Zealanders. It tells a story of the Chinese settler experience, that of the shift from temporary settlement to a more permanent presence in New Zealand. It is also representative of the settlement of Chinese across New Zealand, not just the lower South Island. The remains of the 499 individuals on the wreck came from at least 37 distinct settlements across eight New Zealand regions and both main islands (see Appendix D, The NZCA school resource *Ventnor* poster). This shows its significance beyond Otago goldmining history, and reflects the shift to other occupations. By 1902 large numbers of Chinese were living away from gold mining regions.

The temporal significance extends before and after 1902, the year of the sinking. Some of those whose remains were placed on the *Ventnor* were disinterred after having been buried for decades, while others had not been interred. The revival of Chinese engagement with the *Ventnor* in 2007 shows that the impacts of the *Ventnor* on New Zealand Chinese identity are multigenerational, with known descendants of those whose remains were on the ship continuing to shape its legacy.

²⁶ (a) the extent to which the place reflects important or representative aspects of New Zealand history;
(k) the extent to which the place forms part of a wider historical or cultural area

Criteria (b) and (c).²⁷ There is a significant cultural and historical depth surrounding the *Ventnor*. The *Ventnor* history is associated with the prominent Otago businessman Choie Sew Hoy, whose achievements have been recognised through the heritage listing of other sites associated with his business activities. The *Ventnor* has potential to provide knowledge of aspects of New Zealand history in a different context from other sources. It is a gateway for further education on Chinese history in Aotearoa, New Zealand including the complex relationship and transnational lifeways between migrants and their homeland reflecting Victorian-era globalisation through commerce and labour activities²⁸, Chinese cultural practices in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the contemporary relationships between Māori as tangata whenua and Chinese as tauiwi, and tikanga Māori and traditional Chinese spiritual perspectives.

Criteria (d) and (f).²⁹ The *Ventnor* history provides ample scope for a wide range of educational activities on different themes including migration and settlement, cultural maintenance and intercultural encounters. *Ventnor* histories have been covered in a number of Ministry of Education resources at a national level, and there is potential to expand this into local histories. This is particularly important for iwi Māori in the Hokianga, as the *Ventnor* history is directly connected to their traditional burial sites.

Criterion (e).³⁰ The esteem with which the Chinese community holds the *Ventnor* is described in Q9 *Why do you think it is important?* and Q15 *What information is there about this place?*. Since 2007 there have been multiple visits of large groups (greater than 80 people at a time) to Hokianga, and there have been numerous documentaries, books, plays and operas and educational resources. Esteem is also shown in the Hokianga community, through the three memorials, a display at the Hokianga Historical Society Museum and Archive Centre,³¹ and the prominence of the *Ventnor* story in the Northland economic development organisation's tourism website and map for Hokianga, entitled "*Wandering with Ancestors*".³²

Criterion (j).³³ The *Ventnor* wreck site has a rarity that is valuable to include in the New Zealand Heritage List / Rārangī Kōrero:

²⁷ (b) the association of the place with events, persons, or ideas of importance in New Zealand history; (c) the potential of the place to provide knowledge of New Zealand history

²⁸ For example, the Dunedin firm Kum Goon Lee, set up in Dunedin in 1871 and which had branches in Lawrence (Central Otago), Sydney, Wellington (New South Wales), Hong Kong and Guangzhou.

²⁹ (d) the importance of the place to tangata whenua; (f) the potential of the place for public education

³⁰ (e) the community association with, or public esteem for, the place

³¹ <https://www.ourhokianga.com/ventnorproject.htm>

³² <https://www.northlandnz.com/visit/northland-journeys/wandering-with-ancestors/>

³³ (j) the importance of identifying rare types of historic places

- It represents a present-day coming together of Chinese and Māori history, values and spirituality regarding care and respect for the dead;
- It connects contemporary Chinese with the 19th century forebears, through history, culture and spirituality;
- It brings Chinese New Zealanders together as a community in the context of the *Ventnor* history to explore our sense of place and connectedness in Aotearoa New Zealand; and
- As the sinking of ship carrying a large number of human remains destined for repatriation to China, it is an event unlike any other in Aotearoa New Zealand (and potentially the world).

11. Have You Visited the Place?

NO – the wreck location

YES – nearby coastline sites of significance

Since 2007, the Chinese community has led trips to the Hokianga to visit *Ventnor*-related sites on shore. An attempt was made in 2021 to take Chinese and Māori elders to the location at sea above the wreck, but weather conditions meant that the crossing of the bar was too rough, and the journey was cancelled. The combination of variable weather conditions and limited windows of opportunity during visits - it is important that all the descendant groups are represented - makes a sailing to the waters above the seabed site difficult to arrange. The limited number of passengers per size of the boats is also a challenge. However, the community always visits the nearest publicly accessible point from which visitors can look out to sea in the direction of the wreck's location. This is halfway around the cliff-top Arai Te Uru Recreational Reserve Walk.

12. How Would You Describe the Place?

The Hokianga Harbour

The Hokianga Harbour is closely associated with Kupe. As noted in Te Ara – The Encyclopedia of New Zealand:

“The Polynesian explorer Kupe is said to have returned on his canoe *Matawhaorua* to Hawaiki from Hokianga – hence the original name Te Hokianga-a-Kupe (the returning place of Kupe). In preparation for the return voyage his people made an earth oven on the harbour shore, but the food was cold, and Kupe cursed and banished them. This place was named Kohukohu (curse). Kupe left behind his taniwha, Ārai-te-uru, in the form of a reef. He also hurled his son Tuputupuwhenua into a spring, where he became a protective taniwha. Kupe named other rocks and places: Ngā Kurī-a-Kupe (Kupe’s dog), Pori Here (genealogical ties) and Ākiha (a taniwha at the mouth of the harbour).”³⁴

As one of the earliest areas of Māori settlement, Hokianga is a heartland for Māori³⁵ and a foundational area for Ngāpuhi.³⁶

One of the three memorials to the *Ventnor* is located at the Manea: Footprints of Kupe, a venue and cultural experience that honours Kupe and celebrates the Hokianga Harbour.

The *Ventnor* Wreck Site

The SS *Ventnor* was a British 3,961-tonne steel twin-screw cargo steamship that sank off the coast of Hokianga Heads at 9:30 pm on October 28, 1902, after striking a reef near Cape Egmont that morning. Thirteen men died in the sinking. The condition of the wreck and surrounding area are described in Q13: *What condition is it in?*

13. What Condition is it in?

We note this from Edwards, B. and Jamieson, B. 2014. Archaeological Assessment of the SS *Ventnor* Ship Wreck:

“Due to the nature of the site, an archaeological survey has not been conducted, so the extent of any degradation and its overall condition are undetermined. Human remains at the site and the interior of the wreck have been filmed by a private film crew using a remote-controlled camera system, but this footage is not publicly accessible. Destructive fishing methods such

³⁴ <https://teara.govt.nz/en/map/2388/places-associated-with-kupe>

³⁵ <https://www.kohukohu.nz/local-information/history/maori-history/>

³⁶ <https://www.ourhokianga.com/HokiangaHistoryHHS.htm>

as bottom-trawling and seining are tangible threats to the condition and longevity of the wreck. However, it is believed to be largely intact, with a proportion of its cargo in situ. Cargo and wreckage, including intact coffins, an empty lifeboat, and bones, are known to have washed ashore around the Hokianga Harbour and Aupōuri Peninsula.

“The Heritage New Zealand Northern Region Area Manager Bill Edwards has been verbally advised by a person who has dived on the ship that the *Ventnor* appeared to have sunk very rapidly, with the bow of the ship having gone straight into the sandy sea bed. Debris surrounds the wreck, including a scattering of coal. Due to its location off the Northland coast, the wreck has become entangled with stray fishing nets, which now cover the site and are caught in the ship’s structure (p. 12).”

“Details surrounding the condition of the site are unknown, but it is expected to be in good condition. The site of the SS *Ventnor* has lain undisturbed for the last 112 years with historical records indicating that the cargo was never salvaged (p. 13).”



THE S.S. VENTNOR GOING DOWN, BOWS FIRST, OFF HOKIANGA HEADS.

The SS Ventnor going down (AWNS-19021113-2-1, Auckland Weekly News, Auckland Library Heritage Collection)

14. What is the History of the Place?

The SS *Ventnor* was chartered by the Cheong Sing Tong 昌善堂, a charitable society founded in 1882 by Chinese men to facilitate the repatriation of the remains of Chinese villagers who had died in New Zealand to their families in China, a practice of cultural and religious importance at the time. The organisation was headed by Choie Sew Hoy, a Chinese businessman based in Dunedin, and, upon his death in 1901, his son Choie Kum Poy.

Most of those who used the service were gold miners from Otago, Southland and the West Coast, but on her final journey the *Ventnor* carried the remains of 499 individuals from all around New Zealand, including Auckland, Hawke's Bay, Manawatū-Whanganui, Wellington and Canterbury, in addition to Otago, Southland and the West Coast.

Following the sinking of the *Ventnor*, intact coffins, boxes and dispersed remains washed up around the Hokianga Heads, the heads of the Whangapē Harbour, and as far north as Te-Oneroa-a-Tōhē / Ninety Mile Beach near Hukatere Road.³⁷ Te Roroa and Te Rarawa gathered remains that washed ashore on their lands and cared for the bones alongside their own tūpuna. The Chinese organisers were not aware that remains had washed ashore and were being cared for.

It was not until 2007 that the descendant community became aware of the history and relationships with Te Roroa, Te Rarawa and others in the area were formed. Today, there are three memorials that pay tribute to those from the *Ventnor* and those who cared for their remains. The first two were erected in 2013, one in the Waipoua Forest on the south side of Hokianga Harbour and the other at Maunga Hione in Mitimiti on the north side. A further memorial at Manea Tapuwai ā Nuku Footprints of Kupe in Opononi, erected by the NZCA, received its Chinese blessing in April 2021.

In January 2014 a dive crew visited the *Ventnor* wreck and brought back a number of artefacts which now reside in the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Several months later the SS *Ventnor* was gazetted as an archaeological site in May 2014.³⁸

From 2007 to the current day, there have been numerous community visits to the Hokianga to keep relationships warm and pay respects to ancestors. There have also been numerous creative and educational projects that have drawn on the history.

³⁷ Auckland Star, Volume LXIII, Issue 5, 7 January 1932, p9.

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/auckland-star/1932/01/07/9>

³⁸ The New Zealand Archaeological Association (NZAA) site record for the SS *Ventnor* is O06/786 (previously recorded as O05/350), available on ArchSite.

15. What Information is Available on the Place?

There has been a significant amount of research on the general history of the *Ventnor* events. There is less information available on the actual site, although more may be known from the work of the divers associated with Definitive Productions.

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Appendices

- A. Letters of support
- B. Voices of Support: Findings from the SS *Ventnor* Heritage Survey 2025
- C. A continuum of community engagement around the site
- D. NZCA school resource *Ventnor* poster. https://hnzpt-rpod-assets.azureedge.net/1lndm2qw/nzca-school-resource_ventnor-map-2-1.pdf

Endorsement of the Application

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