

Hinemihi o te Ao Tawhito (Hinemihi of the Old World)

A Statement of Significance

Every National Trust property has a Statement of Significance which outlines what is particularly important about the property, providing a foundation for future plans. Hinemihi is mentioned in the Clandon Park Statement of Significance, but is sufficiently important in her own right to require a separate Statement.

Hinemihi is a Maori meeting house located within the grounds of Clandon Park, near Guildford, in Surrey. Hinemihi originally comes from Te Wairoa, on the North Island of New Zealand, and her creation was commissioned by Chief Aporo Te Wharekaniwha of the sub-tribe Ngati Hinemihi. To the Maori who built her, Hinemihi was a physical embodiment of an honoured ancestress of Ngati Hinemihi, and Hinemihi is considered to be a living being.

Hinemihi was completed in 1881, and was used both as a traditional meeting house and as a venue to provide entertainment for tourists who came to the area to see the Pink and White Terraces, a unique and monumental creation of deposits from water heated by volcanic activity. This came to an abrupt end on 10 June 1886, when the eruption of Mount Tarawera destroyed Te Wairoa and the whole of the surrounding area. Those villagers (approximately 50) who sheltered inside Hinemihi during the eruption were saved, and 153 lives were lost. The local area was devastated, and local populations resettled elsewhere, but Hinemihi remained.

Hinemihi came to the attention of William Hillier, 4th Earl of Onslow, in January 1892 when Lord Onslow was completing his successful term as Governor of New Zealand. Lord Onslow purchased the 23 pieces of carving (according to the bill of sale) that made up Hinemihi for £50 from Aporo's son Mika, and the carvings were shipped to England and reassembled on the Clandon Park estate near the lake. In 1917, recuperating soldiers from the Maori Pioneer Battalion discovered Hinemihi and concerned about her fragile state, were given permission to move Hinemihi, with the help of other soldiers, to her current location.

Today, Hinemihi is one of only four nineteenth century meeting houses outside of New Zealand, and of these is the only one physically located outside of a museum. Since Hinemihi has not been in New Zealand since 1892, she has not evolved in the way that New Zealand meeting houses have evolved. Hinemihi's unusual journey has made her a survivor, one that reflects Maori cultural struggle and also acts as a memorial to those who created her, sheltered in her, and their living descendants.

Although Hinemihi is now a long way from her original home, to descendants of Ngati Hinemihi she remains a cultural expression that celebrates creation, history, whakapapa (genealogy), kinship, and tribal identity. Since Hinemihi is a living being, she possesses wairua, the spirit or essence of being of her descendants and creators; mauri, a life force and the power of creation from the Gods; and mana, ancestral power, prestige, and status. These characteristics require interaction with humans to maintain them or bring them to life. The reciting of whakapapa and the performance of korero (oratory), speech, and narratives associated with the ancestors, occur on the marae, in front or inside Hinemihi.

With Ngati Hinemihi so far away, the London-based Maori group Ngati Ranana has been invited by Ngati Hinemihi to participate in the kaitiakitanga (guardianship) of Hinemihi, to ensure that Hinemihi maintains her essential, living link with Maori people. The annual hangi, put on by the Maori language school Kohanga Reo, is an opportunity for Maori people to interact with Hinemihi, and for non-Maori to gain a better understanding of Hinemihi and of Maori culture. As such, Hinemihi is also an ambassador for the National Trust and for the local Maori community, linking the histories of New Zealand and the United Kingdom, particularly in terms of the Onslow family's connection to New Zealand.

Hinemihi is many things to many people, a whare tipuna (ancestral house), a whare runanga (meeting house) and a whare wananga (house of learning) for UK-based and visiting Maori, and an opportunity for visitors to Clandon to appreciate Maori culture and history. Due to her uniqueness and her significance, it is appropriate that Hinemihi continues to develop as a focus for Maori culture in the United Kingdom.

Editor: Julie Lawlor, Property Manager, incorporating comments made by the Hinemihi project group, including representatives of Ngati Hinemihi, Ngati Ranana, and the National Trust

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