



WEAVING TALES

Diverse threads in the Foxton community are drawing together to tell their stories, their way

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It's rarely that you'll read a story in *Heritage New Zealand* magazine about an old, empty Mitre 10 building. The cavernous warehouses don't offer much in the way of cultural or architectural significance. But in the Horowhenua town of Foxton, what's beginning to happen inside those metal walls really is something special.

Nearly 10 years ago, Te Awahou Māori Women's Welfare League hosted an exhibition on the work and life of Rangimahora Reihana-Mete. Rangimahora, who was 94 years old when she died in 1993, was not only a kuia to those in her hometown of Foxton, but also one of New Zealand's most notable weavers. Of Ngāti Raukawa and Ngāti Rangiwewehi descent, her artworks are part of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa collection.

But the 2007 exhibition highlighted a gap: there was no permanent place to display the arts and crafts or to tell the stories of Māori from the Foxton area.

Around the same time, 11 Netherlands societies from around New Zealand identified Foxton as the site for a national Dutch museum. Coincidentally, it became increasingly apparent that the Foxton library needed a new home. A local resident suggested the obvious: instead of having separate buildings, wasn't it sensible to put the trio together?

And so began the idea that turned into Te Awahou Nieuwe Stroom, home to the Piriharakeke Generation Inspiration Centre.

Admittedly the names are quite a mouthful. But they make sense with a bit of unravelling: Te Awahou is the Māori word for Foxton and also the drained stream that once ran under where the Mitre 10 building stands and Nieuwe Stroom is the Dutch word for 'new stream'.



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Piriharakeke names the loop that comes off the Manawatū River and winds behind Foxton. Delving deeper, piri means ‘to cling’ or ‘come together’. And, while most know harakeke as flax, it has many meanings. It can be used to refer to ‘grassroots’ and can mean ‘generations’, in reference to whānau.

“Generation Inspiration Centre,” says Awhina Tamarapa, “embodies the philosophy of what we are trying to create: a centre of inspiration for young people in particular.” It’s about knowing who you are; knowing your identity and using that knowledge as encouragement to explore new ideas.

Awhina, together with Pip Devonshire and Manu Kāwana are on the art and exhibition subgroup of Te Taitoa Māori o Te Awahou, a trust formed in 2010 to support the museum idea. “We are responsible for driving the development of Piriharakeke,” says

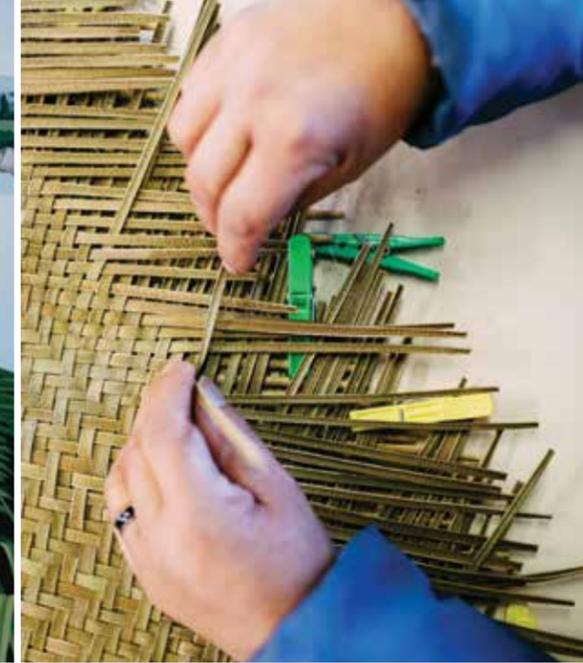
Pip, who is a weaver and great-granddaughter of Rangimahora Reihana-Mete.

It’s appropriate the idea for Te Awahou Nieuwe Stroom began with the work of a weaver, says Project Manager Cathy McCartney.

“The whole facility is really a weaving together of cultures. We are creating a shared space where we can tell the stories of the local iwi; of the Dutch who, starting with Abel Tasman, have been integral to New Zealand’s development and history; and of the local Foxton population. It is a genuinely collaborative project – all the interested groups have been involved in the development of the policies, branding, architecture and exhibition themes and plans.”

As it should be. After all, it’s happening at a bicultural historic place. “The Mitre 10 site is where Ihakara Tukumarū, the leading Ngāti Raukawa chief

1 The stories told and displayed in the Piriharakeke Generation Inspiration Centre will have an inclusive approach of the people of Te Awahou. Many iwi members have been involved in the project, including (from left) Manu Kawana, Pip Devonshire, Te Kenehi Teira (Kaihautū/National Māori Heritage Manager, Heritage New Zealand), Hayley Bell and Awhina Tamarapa.



Koinei tō tātou wāhi
tūpuna ka whiria ai
ngā ahurea me te
mātauranga ki te
whakaaro nui me te
mana.

Dit is onze plek, waar
cultuuren en kennis
zich samenweven
onder de mensen, met
visie en trots.

This is our place,
where people
weave cultures and
knowledge with vision
and pride.





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of the Te Awahou district, invited and welcomed the first Pākehā settlers of the Manawatū and Horowhenua districts to live with iwi in peace,” says Te Kenehi Teira, Kaihautū/National Māori Heritage Manager and, as he describes himself, a product of the bicultural heritage of the town and its people. “Ihakara was already in partnership with Thomas U Cook, who was the Pākehā father of Foxton. Cook owned the first hotel (the Adelaide) and wharf at Foxton along with his Ngāti Raukawa wife, Meretini Te Akau. Many of the town’s people descend from this couple.

“The Adelaide Hotel was exactly where the Mitre 10 building is today and the wharf is directly behind it. Beside the hotel was the Te Awahou Stream and it was named after Ihakara’s aunty, who had eel and whitebaiting traps in the stream.”

The development of the facility began with a ceremonial sod turning during Matariki this year and the grand opening is scheduled for Matariki 2017 – a decade after the original exhibition. In late 2013 the Horowhenua District Council approved the purchase of the Mitre 10 building and shortly afterwards hired Cathy to oversee the project.

“The community wanted a local cultural hub for exhibitions and performances but also places to meet or just curl up in the sun and read. They wanted it to be a tourist destination that might encourage more people to pull off State Highway 1,” says Cathy. “The

goal was to create something that was open, that flowed from one space to another, that wasn’t made of small rooms and galleries, and that embraced – and built on – the Māori, Dutch and local culture and heritage. The empty Mitre 10 shed-like building was perfect.”

Its location was also fortunate – it happens to be alongside Foxton’s current tourist attractions: the De Molen windmill, the Flax Stripper Museum and Whare Manaaki, a working space for Māori creative arts, including weaving and carving.

“Another of the responsibilities of Te Taitoa Māori o Te Awahou are the activities of Whare Manaaki,” says Pip. “Ultimately we’ll have stories and taonga within Piriharakeke, but Whare Manaaki is the complement. It’s where the actual weaving, carving and painting are done; where taonga are being created.”

A passion for iwi-driven, community-led cultural heritage projects is becoming more common, says museum consultant Lily Frederikse, whose responsibility is to ensure that Te Awahou Nieuwe Stroom comes together as a cohesive and consistent product. In addition to the Piriharakeke Generation Inspiration Centre, she lists the Ngāti Kahungunu Innovation Centre in Hastings and Te Ahu in Kaitiāia as examples of new facilities where iwi are telling their stories.

“It has been typical practice,” she says, “for museums to talk about cultural groups in a way

WHY A NATIONAL DUTCH MUSEUM? WHY IN FOXTON?

The Dutch Connection Trust aims to create an icon that can symbolise the Dutch presence in New Zealand. The museum will inform, educate and inspire New Zealand about its Dutch connections, illustrate the many benefits of multiculturalism, showcase the difficulties as well as the achievements of the Dutch migration story and be a place with a strong sense of national identity.

And why not in Foxton? The Dutch population is dispersed throughout New Zealand with no specific geographical base. When the New Zealand Dutch population was looking for a place to celebrate being Dutch, it probably didn’t hurt that Dutch immigrant John Langeim had settled in Foxton and, working with other immigrants, built the De Molen windmill as a tourist attraction and nod towards the similarity of Foxton to their homeland.

The De Molen windmill opened in 2003 and is a full-size, working, 17th-century Dutch windmill that uses a traditional grinding stone for making flour (which is sold on site).

that was reasonably removed. Now the social responsibility within museums and community engagement has become important. This has led to these participatory co-creation models.”

Indeed, Awhina, Pip and Manu do not work in isolation. “We’ve been continually meeting with people who have historical knowledge and have interest in Piriharakeke,” says Awhina.

“We held a hui ā-hapū in February to allow people to come together and learn about the project and express interest in [and] be involved with the development of the exhibition. From that hui we had really fantastic ideas of things that could be shown.

“Now we are looking for people to represent their hapū. It’s quite challenging because this is uncharted ground,” she says.

“You can really see the value of communities determining for themselves what they want to say and share with other people about themselves.”

Concepts like kaitiakitanga (custodianship) and whanaungatanga (relationships) will be prevalent; there will be stories about the history of Ngāti Raukawa and the aspirations of the people of Te Awahou.

“We can only start by having hui and asking: ‘What do you want to say and how do you want to say it?’, and asking them what medium, audio visuals, text, what taonga even,” says Awhina. “It’s laying out the possibility to people and hoping that they’ll be encouraged to start thinking about it.”

The main theme of Piriharakeke will be about the values and cultural expressions of being mana whenua to Te Awahou, explains Cathy. “And it will be presented in their way, with their voices and words. This model of councils and iwi groups combining resources for mutual benefit is very important. In our case, it extends to the Dutch Connection Trust building its museum in the same way: their stories, their words. The local Foxton community will also have a place to tell their own stories and support their people.”

“This is an awesome project,” says Awhina. “People can learn from it, other iwi, other museums. For too long the museum model has been about others telling people’s stories. That’s got to change. This is an example of empowerment, of the community voice.” ■

1 Hayley Bell, chairperson of Te Taitoa Māori o Te Awahou Trust.

2 Horowhenua Mayor Brendan Duffy cheers as Hayley Bell and Dutch Ambassador Rob Zaagman turn the first sod.

3 A visitor peruses the portfolio of the building redesign, which is being led by architect Pete Bossely.

4 Plenty of big, north-facing windows will provide sunny places for conversing, meeting and lounging.

5 Approximately 125 members of the Foxton community braved a cold winter morning to celebrate the official beginning of construction.



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