

HISTORICAL AND TECHNICAL REPORT

RĀKAU WHAKAPAPA GENEALOGICAL STAFF

X67.423A

**FOWLER MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LOS ANGELES
(UCLA)**



**REPORT PRODUCED BY
BRENT KEREHONA PUKEPUKE-AHITAPU BA, MTeach
FEBRUARY 2026**

RĀRANGI IHIRANGI/TABLE OF CONTENTS

Tīmatanga Kōrero/Introduction

Rārangi ihirangi/Contents:	p. 2,
Kuputaka/Glossary	p. 3,
Kupu whakataki/Preface & Traditional Knowledge (TK) labels	p. 4,
Haurongo/Biography	p. 5,
Ara Rangahau/Research methodology:	p. 6,
He Mihi/Acknowledgements	p. 6,
Pūrongo Kōrero o nehe/Historical Report	p. 7,
Tāhuhu kōrero – Background Story:	pp. 8-14,
Pūrongo Kupu ā-kaupapa/Technical Report	p. 15,
Pūrongo Tīariari/Existing Report	p. 16-17,
Taipitopito tirohanga/Examination details	
1. Taipitopito whakawhiwhinga/Accession details	p. 18,
2. Momo Taonga/Type of object	p. 18,
3. Pinetohu/Labels and tags	p. 18,
4. Whakaahuatanga/Description	p. 19,
5. Inenga/Dimensions	pp. 20-22,
6. Taimaha/Weight	p. 22,
7. Rauemi/Materials	p. 22,
8. Whakanakonako/Embellishments	pp. 29,
9. Tukanga/Process	p. 30,
10. Pakarutanga/Damage	p. 31,
11. Whakaaturanga, Whakahaumarutanga rānei/Display or Storage	p. 32,
Whakapapa/Provenance	pp. 33-35,
Hītori tanga/Publication history	p. 36,
Ngā tuhinga a te kaituhituhi/Author's Notes	p. 36,
Whakahokia mai/Repatriation	p. 36,
Rārangi pukapuka/Bibliography-End Notes	p. 37, and
Tūtohu/Sign Off	p. 37.

KUPUTAKA/GLOSSARY

Kupu ē-kaupapa/Term	Whakamāramatanga/Definition
Haerenga	Journey
Hapū	Sub-tribe
Haehae	Parallel lines used in carving designs
Hītori	History
Iwi	Tribe
Kaiwhakairo	Carver
Karu	Eye/s
Kaumātua	Respected elders
Kawa	Protocols of practice, how things are done (see also tikanga)
Parāoa	Whale bone
Pūrākau	Stories, oral history
Mātauranga	Traditional knowledge
Rākau	Stick or wooden staff
Rangahau	Research
Rangatira	Chief or chiefly in nature
Rauponga	Combination of haehae lines and pātaki.
Taonga	Cultural treasure or artefact
Tikanga	Correct procedure or custom (see kawa)
Tinana	Body
Tūpuna	Ancestors
Te Ao Māori	The Māori World or Māori worldview
Uhi	Chisel
Ūpoko	Head
Uri	Descendants
Waewae	Legs
Whakanakonako	Embellishments
Whakapapa	Genealogy
Whānau/Whanaunga	Relative/s

KUPU WHAKATAKI/PREFACE

‘Ko te manu e kai ana i te miro nōnā te ngahere, ko te manu e kai ana i te mātauranga nōnā te ao.’

The forest belongs to the bird who feasts on the miro berry, the world belongs to the bird who feasts on education.
Māori Whakatauki/Proverb

The *whakapapa* and *hītori* of *taonga*, or the provenance and history of cultural treasures, are as important as the items themselves. Whenever the term *taonga* is used within this report, the author is referring to cultural treasures, although Western practice usually refers to them simply as artefacts or objects.

Mātauranga (knowledge) of who the *kairaranga* (weaver) or the *kaiwhakairo* (carver) was, the *iwi* or *hapū* (subtribe) from which they affiliate, the identity of the receiver, and the reasons for the gifting – are also *taonga* and unfortunately, far too much of this information has been lost to time.

Māori *taonga* rest in countless institutions around the world, museums, galleries, libraries, and private collections, and although the author does not take issue with this as such; he does feel that far too many *taonga* are displayed, or held, without an appropriate level of cultural and historical context. After visiting several museums in Europe, the United States of America, Australia, and the United Kingdom, the author noticed that several of our *taonga* had either minimal information, no cultural context, or worse, some information panels bore the terms ‘Unknown’ or ‘Unidentified’ and the name of the collector or collection was more prominent than the *taonga* itself.

As a weaver, a novice carver, and a Māori historian, the author felt that he was able to examine select *taonga* from institutions in countries to which he travels and produce documents that would provide these institutions with a general level of historical and technical information. The author has been fortunate to have undertaken extensive international travel, for work, research, and holidays, and has recently begun integrating museum and gallery visits into these trips; contacting institutions prior to any of his *haerenga* (journeys), to ascertain what *taonga* they have, and what he might want to access and examine – or what they would like to know more about.

By no means does he claim to be an expert in the study of Māori *taonga* and feels that there are others of greater standing within the field; however, he offers his knowledge, as best as he is able, to produce research documents that provide substantially more information than is currently held on these specific *taonga*.

The compilation and provision of these reports serve several purposes: to do the *taonga* justice by visiting and spending time with them; to examine them and promote their whereabouts; make their locations known to Māori (and other interested persons); and to uncover their *pūrākau* (stories) and bring them back to life. This third practice of uncovering their *pūrākau* achieves several outcomes, these being: to reunite them with *uri* (direct descendants) and *whanaunga* (relatives); to provide the institutions with a credible and informative record of the respective *taonga*; and ensuring their stories are not forgotten – *ka maumahara tonu tātou kia rātou*.

The term *rākau whakapapa* means genealogical staff, and this report refers specifically to a *taonga* which was used to assist in the recitation of genealogy and is part of the Fowler Museum Collections at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA).

TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE (TK) LABELS



Local Contexts Project ID

d0dad66a-78b9-441e-a6ba-81304f7edf57

Project URL

<https://localcontextshub.org/projects/d0dad66a-78b9-441e-a6ba-81304f7edf57>

Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License 4.0 (CC BY-NC 4.0)



HAURONGO/BIOGRAPHY



The author's cultural background sees him affiliated with the *iwi* (tribes) of Ngāpuhi, Ngāi Tūhoe, Te Whakatōhea, and Te Whānau-a-Apanui, as well as having connections to Alveston in Gloucestershire, Bloomsbury in London, and Helsingborg in Sweden – all of which he has visited.

He is ex-military, having served in the army as a paratrooper and then military police officer; before studying a Bachelor of Arts, and then a Master of Teaching degree, and becoming a history teacher, and a military and Māori historian.

The author is a cultural practitioner: *kairaranga* (weaver), novice *kaiwhakairo* (carver), and *kaihaka* (performer).

He is a published author, producing articles, reports, and story books; produced a historical short film; delivered lectures around the world; and contributed towards exhibitions in institutions in Aotearoa New Zealand, and Australia.

The author's research has been referred to in the media; mentioned in legal cases; used on government websites; presented in museums; stopped the sale of *taonga* at auction and assisted in the repatriation of *taonga* back to Aotearoa New Zealand.

He has also appeared on television and radio in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia, as a *tumu kōrero* (historian), in documentaries, news, and cultural programs.

The author is a husband, father, and grandfather, who believes in the importance of teaching his *whānau* (family) *mātauranga* and *toi Māori* and including them in his *kaupapa rangahau* (research projects); taking them with him on these *haerenga* (journeys) if the opportunities allow.

It is his goal to contribute toward *Māoritanga* and *Te Ao Māori* (The Māori World) in a positive and impactful manner and hopes that this report goes some way towards achieving this objective.

ARA RANGAHAU/RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



The author examines a *rākau whakapapa*/genealogical staff online, with Katherine Anderson at the Fowler Museum, UCLA,

This report was compiled by the author, utilising: online and library/archive-based research; consultation with curators; conducting interviews with *kaiwhakairo* (carvers); as well as carrying out a physical examination of the *rākau whakapapa* itself. The physical examination of the artefact was undertaken at the Fowler Museum, UCLA on 23rd January 2026. The online and library-based research was undertaken between December 2025 – February 2026. The consultation process and interviews with Māori academics and *kaumātua* began in January 2026, and are ongoing, as per Māori *kawa* and *tikanga*.

Facsimiles of original documentation, provided by the Fowler Museum during the research process, included: the Fowler Museum object report, the Wellcome card which accompanied the *taonga* when acquired by the Fowler. Information from, and images of these documents, are provided by permission of the Fowler Museum. All physical descriptions, including measurements, and any condition notes, were obtained during the examination of the *taonga*.

HE MIHI/ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks, and acknowledgment goes to the following people and institutions for their support and assistance: Fowler Museum: Silvia Forni – Director, Katherine Anderson – Collections Information Coordinator (who provided the images), Isabella Kelly-Ramirez – Manager Collections, Rachel Raynor – Director of Registration and Collections Management, and Jeanette Saunders – Registrar.

PŪRONGO KŌRERO O NEHE

HISTORICAL REPORT

TĀHUHU KŌRERO/BACKGROUND STORY

‘Kia whakakapi i ngā whāwhārua ā ō tātou tūpuna.’

Follow in the footsteps of our ancestors. - Māori Whakataukī

Whakapapa, or genealogy, is fundamental to Māori identity, providing a framework that connects individuals to their ancestors, land, and the universe, establishing belonging, rights, and responsibilities. It's a holistic system of knowledge, not just a family tree, linking people to the spiritual and natural worlds through storytelling, ritual, and connection to *whānau* (family), *hapū* (subtribe), and *iwi* (tribe). Understanding *whakapapa* is crucial for well-being, identity, and cultural practice, giving context to life and purpose, and acting as a bedrock for understanding one's place in the world and the cosmos.

A *rākau whakapapa*/genealogical staff is held by an orator as they move their hand along the notches and recites *whakapapa*, effectively used as a mnemonic device: the notches, carvings, or patterns act as prompts for the speaker to remember names, events, and relationships in the correct sequence aid to recall and recite complex family histories (genealogies) during important oral traditions, helping to connect people to their identity, land, and lore. These staffs are more than just sticks; they're sacred tools that hold the stories and connections of a people, preserving knowledge across generations.

The following list shows the past seven generations of the author's Te Whakatōhea *whakapapa* (genealogy) from his 3 x great grandparents, down to his adult sons:

Noho Kupenga Tipare (F) + Moka Te Kaingamatā (M) = Taawhi Moka

Horowai Roka (F) + Taawhi Moka (M) = Wīteria Taawhi Moka

Te Uira Rewita (F) + Wīteria Taawhi Moka (M) = Pani Wīteria Taawhi Moka

Pani Wīteria Taawhi Moka (F) + Parani Kerehoma (M) = Taawhi Kerehona (Pukepuke-Ahitapu)

Taawhi Kerehona (Pukepuke-Ahitapu) (M) + Lois Manning (F) = *Brent Kerehona (Pukepuke-Ahitapu)

1. Brent Kerehona (Pukepuke-Ahitapu) + Rosemary Reid = Tamihana Kerehona (Pukepuke-Ahitapu)
2. Brent Kerehona (Pukepuke-Ahitapu) + Delise Hema = Jonah Kerehona (Pukepuke-Ahitapu)

*The researcher/author.

This portion of *whakapapa* begins with an intertribal link between Te Whakatōhea and Ngāpuhi in 1823.

An orator would move from one *taratara* (notched protrusion) to the next in utilising this series of protrusions, not only mentioning names, but also *pūrākau* (stories) and *hītori* (history) regarding each person or union. For example, when beginning with the first union, information such as Moka was a Ngāpuhi chief who in 1823, raided Te Whakatōhea lands, taking Noho as his wife. They had four children, Te Ahitapu, Rewiri Tarapata, Taawhi, and Te Karehu. Although living in Te Tai Tokerau (Northland) in his younger years, Taawhi was sent back to Te Whakatōhea by his mother, where he married Horowai Roka.

As with all *rākau whakapapa*, there can be similar names held by different individuals, having descended from common *tupuna* (ancestors), however, they will branch off at some point and become unique to each person.

In essence, the *rākau whakapapa* is a physical embodiment of *whakapapa*, linking the past, present, and future through tangible *taonga* (objects).

Physical whakapapa

The Māori people have a long and meaningful relationship with *tohorā* (whales)

‘It is said that whales guided the canoes that brought the first people to New Zealand. In one story, the Tākitimu canoe travelled behind a pod of whales during a storm. In another, a water spirit, thought to be a whale, calmed the waves for the canoe of the Tainui tribes. Priests who navigated called on sea animals to guide the canoes and protect them from storms.’ⁱ

In traditions, there are many Māori who rode whales, one of these *pūrākau* (stories) tells of Paikea, the youngest son of Uenuku, a chief from Mangaia in the Cook Islands.



This carving of Paikea, the whale rider, was made by the well-known East Coast carver Pine Taiapa. It sits at the roof apex of Whitirēia marae in Whāngārā. Paikea is the ancestor of the Ngāti Konohi sub-tribe, at Whāngārā, as well as the Ngai Tahu people of Te Wai Pounamu (South Island).ⁱⁱ

‘Paikea was the youngest and favourite son of the chief Uenuku from the island of Mangaia in the present day Cook Islands. This favouritism made Paikea's elder brothers extremely jealous. They conspired to kill Paikea while fishing offshore and tell Uenuku he drowned. But the night before the trip Paikea feigned sleep and overheard his brothers plotting. When far out to sea Paikea foiled their plan by deliberately sinking the canoe and drowning his brothers.

Now adrift in a great ocean, Paikea clung to a canoe plank and awaited his own death. It was then that Tohorā the whale appeared and lifted Paikea onto his great back. Tohorā took Paikea south to New Zealand and the settlement of Whangara just north of present-day Gisborne. Here, Paikea began a new and prosperous life.’ⁱⁱⁱ

Te Tahi-o-te-rangi rode a whale from White Island to the Whakatāne River. And the priest Tūnui rode his pet whale at Cape Kidnappers in Hawke's Bay.

A generic name for whale is *tohorā*, however, there are names for specific varieties, such as: *Hakurā* or *Iheihe* – Scamperdown whale; *Paikea* – Southern humpback whale, or a whale with a white belly and deep grooves along its length; *Pakake* – Minke whale; *Ūpokohue* – blackfish or pilot whale; and the much sought after *Pāraoa* – Sperm whale, hence the use of the word *pāraoa* when attached to whalebone *taonga*.



Scamperdown whale^{iv}



Minke whale^v



Humpback whale^{vi}



Sperm whale^{vii}

Māori harvested food and materials from whales that occasionally stranded on their shores. This sustainable, low-impact whaling began changing in the late 1700s, when foreign ships from Western nations came to hunt the large pods of whales in Pacific waters; with a few Māori becoming involved in the later 1700s, such as famed Ngāti Kahu chief, Ruatara, who worked onboard the Sperm whaler the *Argo* as it travelled around the South Pacific. In the mid-1800s, Māori were working in the shore stations or commanding the whaleboats, as did the author's Ngāpuhi *tupuna* (ancestors) who invested in a pair of whaling vessels and plied their trade in the waters of Ipipiri/Pēwhairangi (Bay of Islands).

The author is drawn to *taonga parāoa* (whalebone objects), having personal connections with this *taonga*. As mentioned above, the author's *tupuna* (ancestors) were whalers, having purchased a pair of 'clinkers' and whaling in the waters of Ipipiri/Pēwhairangi (The Bay of Islands) in the latter half of the 1800s. Unfortunately, two of three chiefly brothers, Rewiri Tarapata, and Wīteria Taawhi (who also *whakapapa* to Te Whakatōhea), lost their lives in a storm off the coast of Rakaumangamanga; a mountain that was sacred to the *hapū* of Te Patukeha and Ngāti Kuta, to which the author also identifies as being one of his *maunga* (mountains).

Metaphysical whakapapa

A *rākau whakapapa* does not just have a physical origin (*tohorā*/whale), it also touches on concepts like identity, change, time, and space. They been handled by generations of *tupuna* (ancestors), and this has imbued them with the *mana* (prestige) of these people, as well as the *mana* of the figure on the top of the *rākau whakapapa*. These have told the stories of millennia through different eras, in different locations, and after countless events. They are vessels that hold and represent *hītori* (history) and *pūrākau* (stories) for perpetuity.

This *rākau whakapapa* (genealogical staff) originates from the township of Ōpōtiki, in the Bay of Plenty, Te Ika a Maui (The North Island), Aotearoa New Zealand. The town takes its name from the longer, Ōpōtiki-mai-tawhiti; which refers to the *puna* (spring) above Waiotahi Beach. These are the ancestral lands of the Te Whakatōhea *Iwi* (tribe), including the Ngāti Ira, Ngāti Ngāhere, Ngāti Ruatakena, Ngāti Patumoana, Ngāi Tamahaua, and currently in contention, Te Ūpokorehe, *hapū* (subtribes).

The people of Te Whakatōhea, trace their *whakapapa* (genealogy) through those who arrived on the Mātaatua *waka* (canoe) with notable *tūpuna* (ancestors) being: Toroa, Puhī, and Muriwai; the Nukutere *waka* captained by Tautūrangi, which arrived nine generations earlier; and possibly the Te Arautautā *waka* captained by Tarawa and his brother Tuwharanui, which arrived during the Great Migration from Hawaiki.

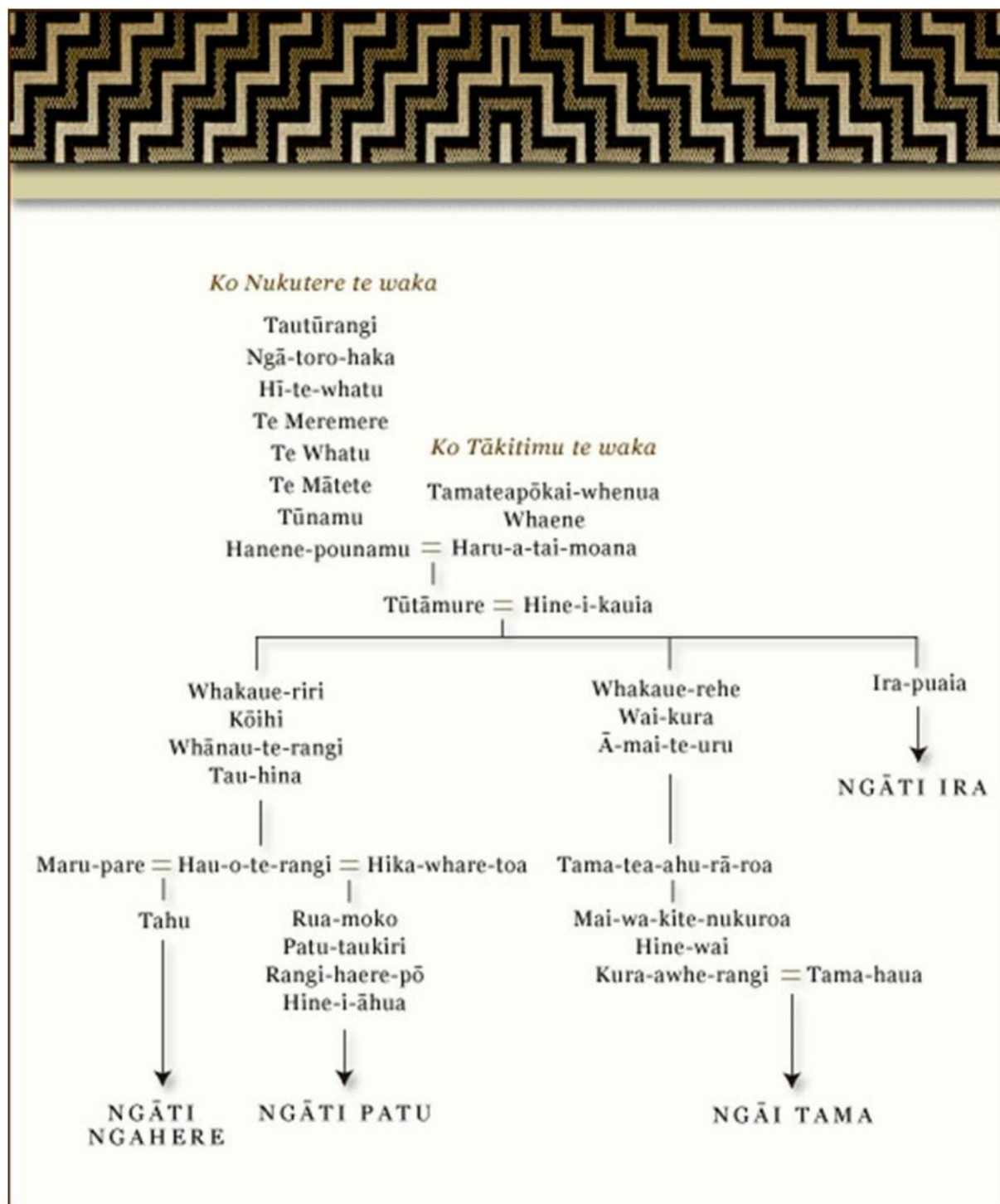
Uri (descendants) of the Mātaatua, believe that their *waka* departed from Hawaiki (some believe this to be the Cook Islands) to bring *kumara* (sweet potatoes) to Te Ika a Maui (The North Island), Aotearoa New Zealand; however, precisely which island group is yet to be ascertained. Cook Island Māori historian, Tinokura Auru Tairea, makes this connection, as does Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Tuwharetoa historian, the late Hamiora Tumutara Pio (1814-1901).



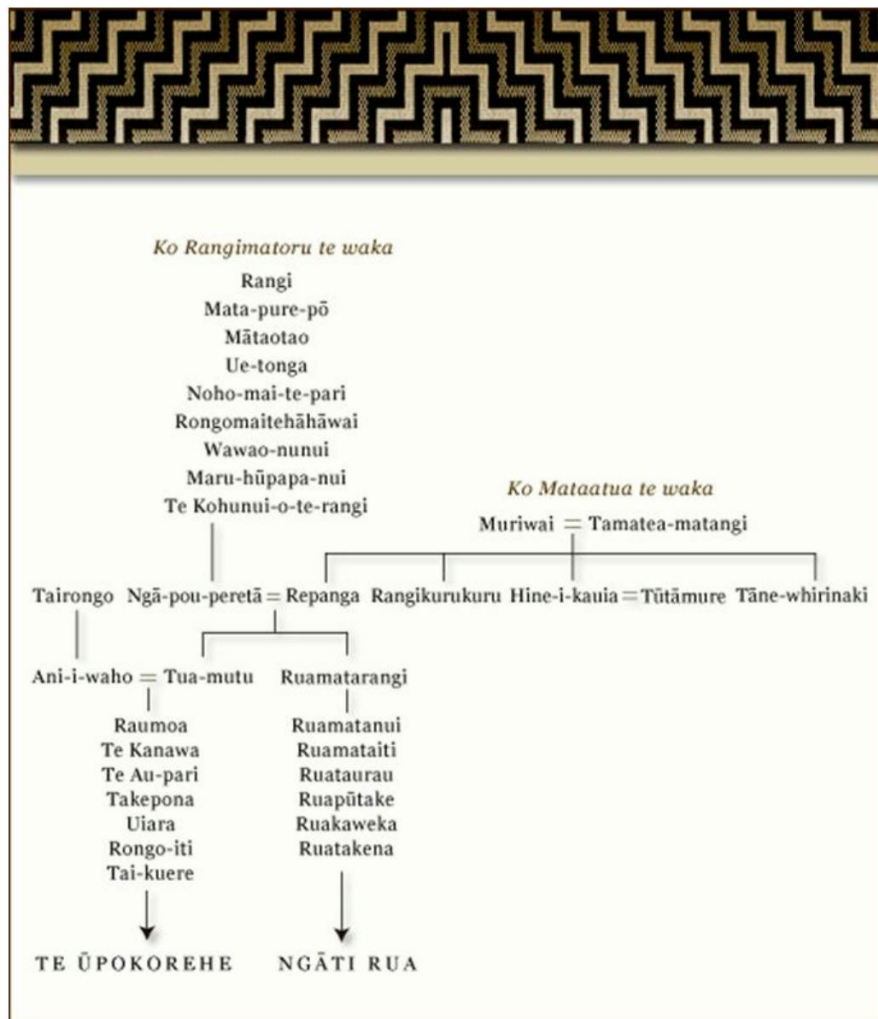
Kimiangatau, on the island of Ma'uke, within the Cook Islands.



A section of the Ma'uke coastline.



Tamahaua, and Ngāti Irapuaia hapū to the Nukutere waka.



Whakapapa (genealogy) chart showing the descent of Ngāti Ruatakena and Te Ūpokorehe hapū, from the Mātaatua waka.



Images of *pou* (carved posts) which depict the arrival in the area by the Arotautau and Te Tohorā waka (canoes), and the later arrival of European settlers. Photos courtesy of Shirley Williams.

The boundaries of the Te Whakatōhea *rohe* (area) cover over a 35-km stretch of coastline in the eastern Bay of Plenty, from Ōhiwa Harbour to Ōpape. The western boundary is Maraetōtara at Ōhope, and the eastern boundary is at Tarakeha, a fortified ridge *pā* between Ōpape and Awaawakino. The coastal boundaries run inland, south-east through mountainous country, and join just south of Matawai.



Map of Te Whakatōhea lands, spanning from Maraetōtara to the West, Tarakeha to the East, and Matawai to the South.^{viii}



An aerial view of the coastal portion of Ōpōtiki, showing the harbour, and the Ōtara River to the left, and the Waioeka River to the right. These lands were a highly fertile and productive farming region.^{ix}

PŪRONGO KUPU Ā-KAUPAPA TECHNICAL REPORT

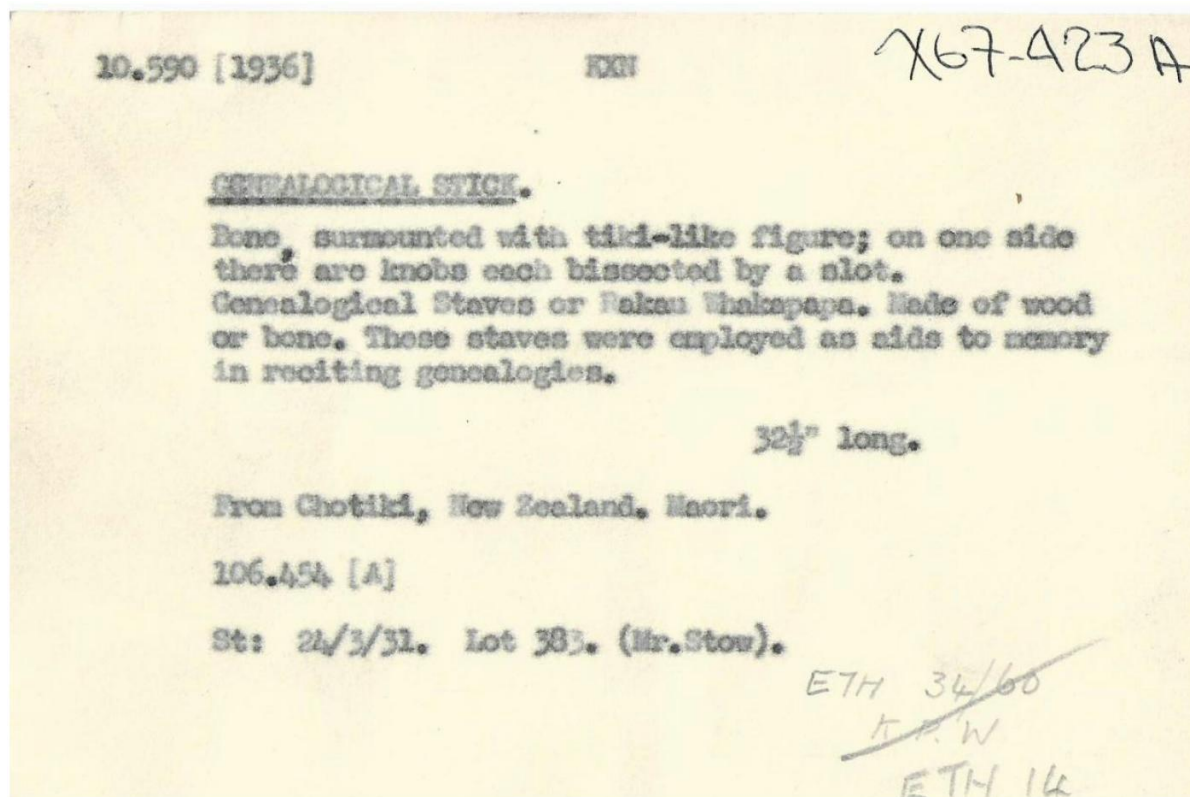
Pūrongo Tīariari/Existing Report

Fowler Museum Report

Object - Fowler_Archaeology: research list request_standard w/Remarks and IMAGE (Grid)	
X67 423A Image	
Object name Culture Group Geo Area Materials Techniques Remarks Old Num Dimension Credit Line	RAKAU WHAKAPAPA, GENEALOGICAL STAFF MAORI NEW ZEALAND BONE CARVED, INCISED, POLISHED OLD NUMBER #10.590/1936 - Welcome card says: "genealogical sticks or RAKAW WHAKAPAPA. These staves were employed as aides to memory in reciting genealogies. Stevens Auction #383, 24/3/1931 (Mr. Stow). R10590/1936, A106454 L: 82.00 cm UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History. Gift of the Wellcome Trust.

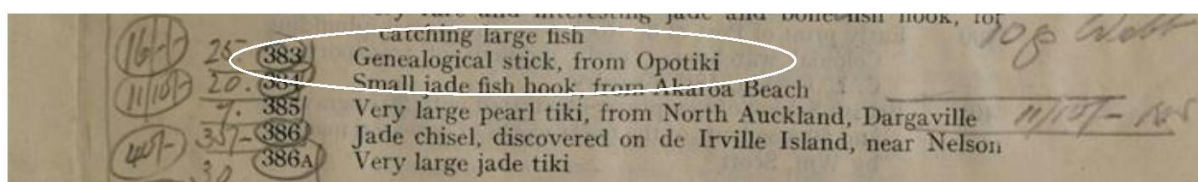
Wellcome card

This identifier card accompanied this *rākau whakapapa*/genealogy staff when it was acquired by the Fowler in 1967. Additional information can be found in the Whakapapa/Provenance section of this report on pages 33-35.



The welcome card bears the following details: '10.90 [1936]' typed in the top-left corner. 'X67-423A' handwritten in black biro ink in the top-right corner. The following text is typed in the centre of the card, 'GENEALOGICAL STICK. Bone, surmounted with tiki-like figure; on one side there are knobs each bisected by a slot. Genealogical Staves or Rakau Whakapapa. Made of wood or bone. These staves were employed as aids to memory in reciting genealogies. 32 ½" long. From Chotiki, New Zealand. Maori. 106.454 [A] St: 24/3/31. Lot 383. (Mr. Stow). In the bottom-right corner, the following reference designators are written in pencil: ETH 34/60 K.P.W ETH 14

The place name of 'Chotiki' is a mistake and is supposed to be *Opotiki* (written as *Ōpōtiki*), a major town in the *Bay of Plenty*, *Te Ika a Maui (North Island)*, *Aotearoa New Zealand*, and a central hub of the Te Whakatōhea people. The Māori alphabet does not include the letter 'c', and the name 'chotiki' does not exist. If it did exist, it would be spelled as 'tiotiki' and there is no place by that name. In any case, the proper spelling can be seen in the *Stevens Auctions Sales Catalogue* (24th March 1931, p. 19).^x



Taipitopito tirohanga/Examination details

Examination date: Friday, 23rd January 2026.

Examination location: Storage Room, Fowler Museum, UCLA., carried out by way of Zoom platform; with Katherine physically handling the *taonga* and the author directing and watching online.

Staff present at examination: Katherine Anderson – Collections Information Coordinator, and Rachel Raynor – Director of Registration and Collections, and Isabella Kelly Ramirez – Manager Collections dropped in briefly.

Momo Taonga/Type of Object

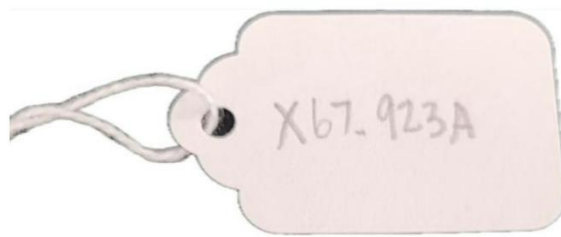
Rākau whakapapa/Genealogical staff

Taipitopito whakawhiwhinga /Accession details

X67-423A

Pinetohu/Labels, tags

There are currently two identifiers regarding this *taonga* (artefact/cultural treasure). These being a small white cardboard identification tag, bearing the following details 'X67.423A', which is tied to the *rākau whakapapa* with a string, and blank ink writing on the rear of the *ūpoko* (head), bearing 'X67.423A', as well as blank ink writing on the side of the *rākau* (staff) bearing the identifier '10590 1936'.



Fowler Museum Identification tag.



Black ink identification marks on the rear of the *ūpoko* (head), and the side of the *rākau* (staff).

Whakaahuatanga/Description

This *rākau whakapapa* (genealogical staff) appears to be a late-18th century or an early 19th century *taonga*, crafted from parāoa (whale bone). The patina is as would be expected from a *taonga* of its estimated age (circa 1780-1830). The top of the *rākau whakapapa* bears a *tekoteko*-like figure, with what appears to be a carved ring of *rauponga* design below the feet of the figure. There is a column of semi-circular protrusions running down the front of the *taonga*, which represent *whakapapa* (genealogy).

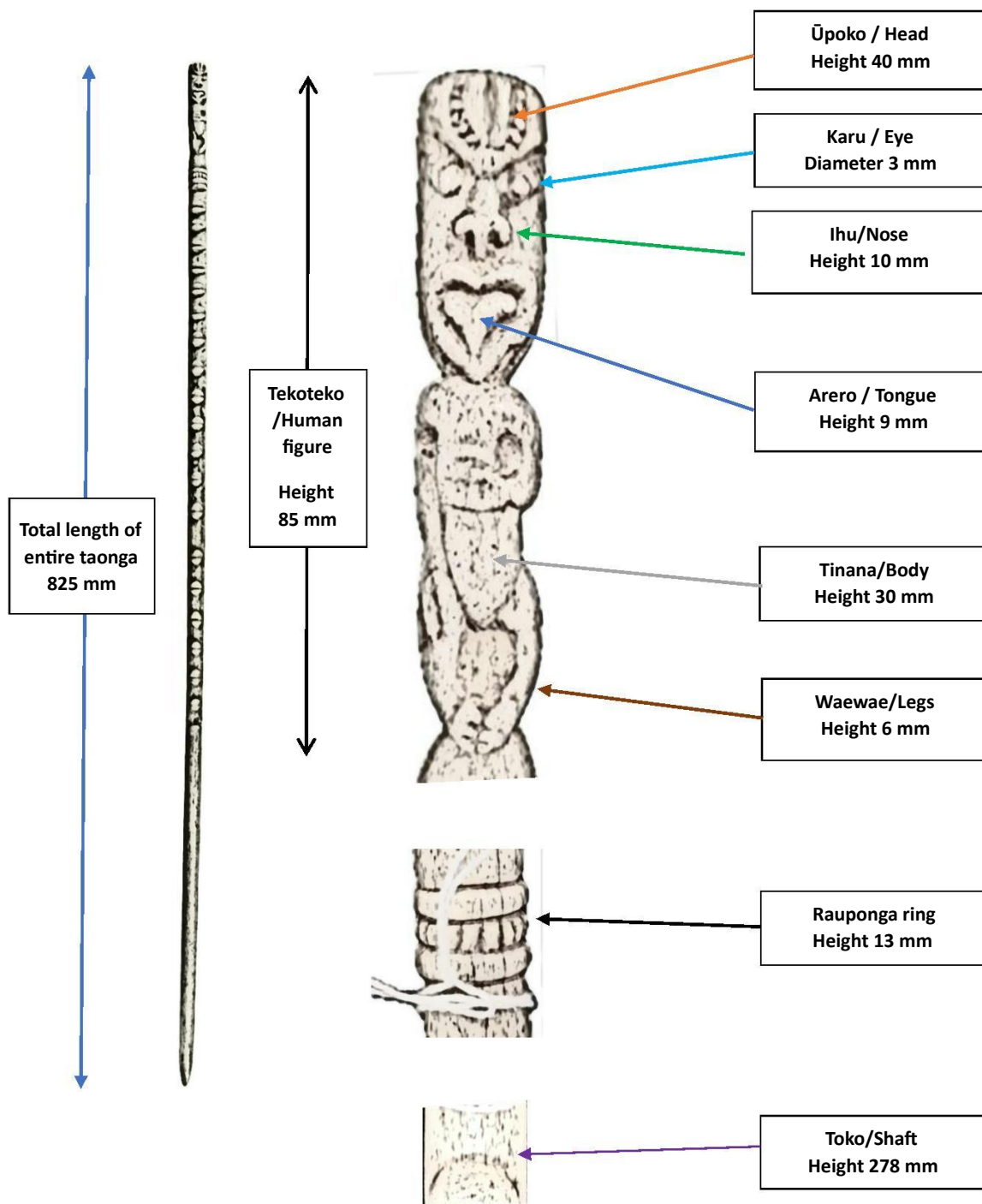


Front profile.

Inenga/Dimensions

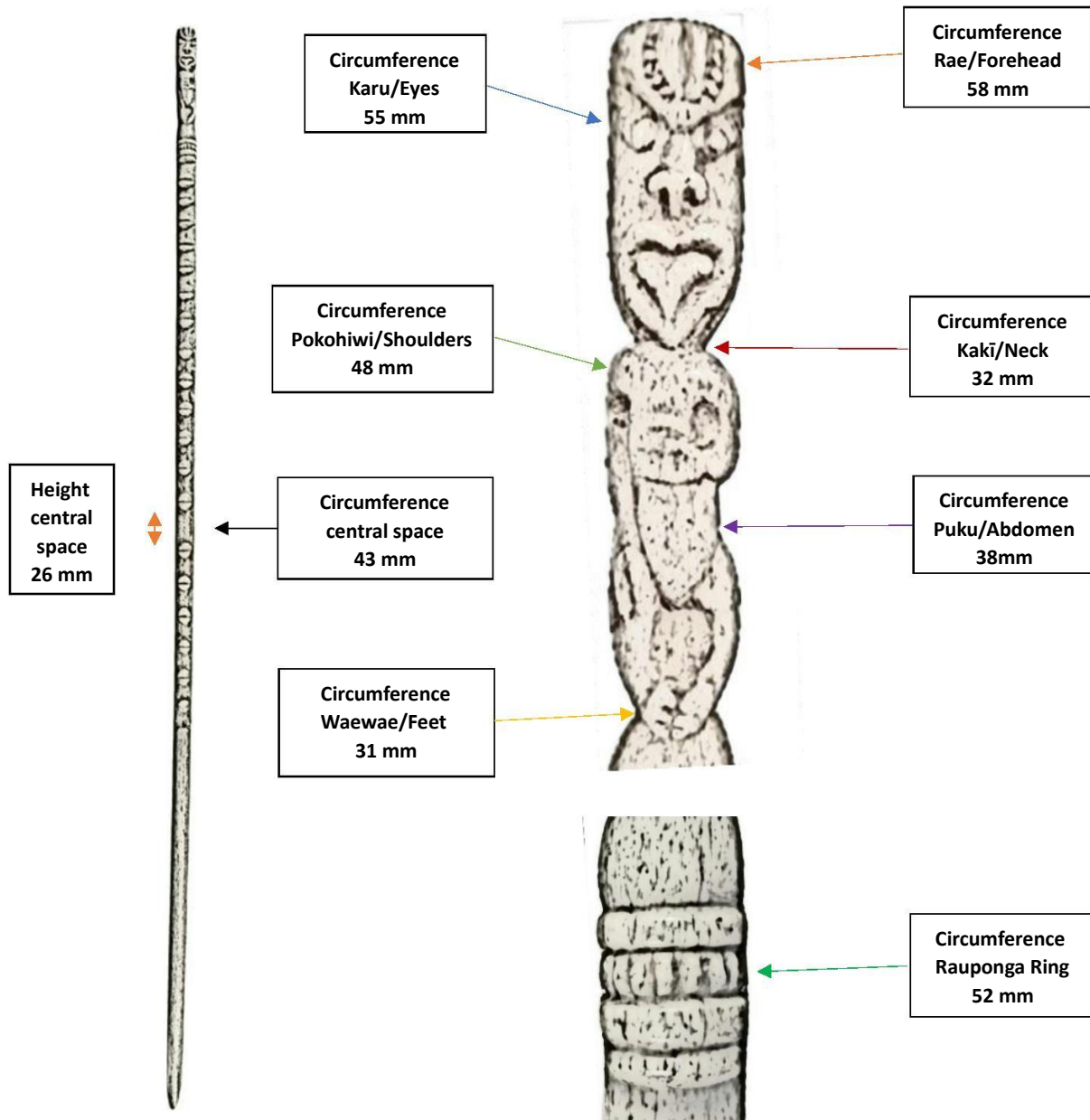
The total length of this *taonga* from the top of the *ūpoko* (head) to the bottom of the *rākau* (shaft), measures 825 mm in length. The *tekoteko* (human figure) measures 85 mm from the top of the *ūpoko* to the bottom of its *kōiti* (toes) in the top-right image. The height of the *ūpoko* measures 40 mm, the *ihu* (nose) measures 10 mm, and the *arero* (tongue) measures 9 mm. The *tinana* (body) measures 30 mm in height, whilst the *waewae* (legs) measure 6 mm.

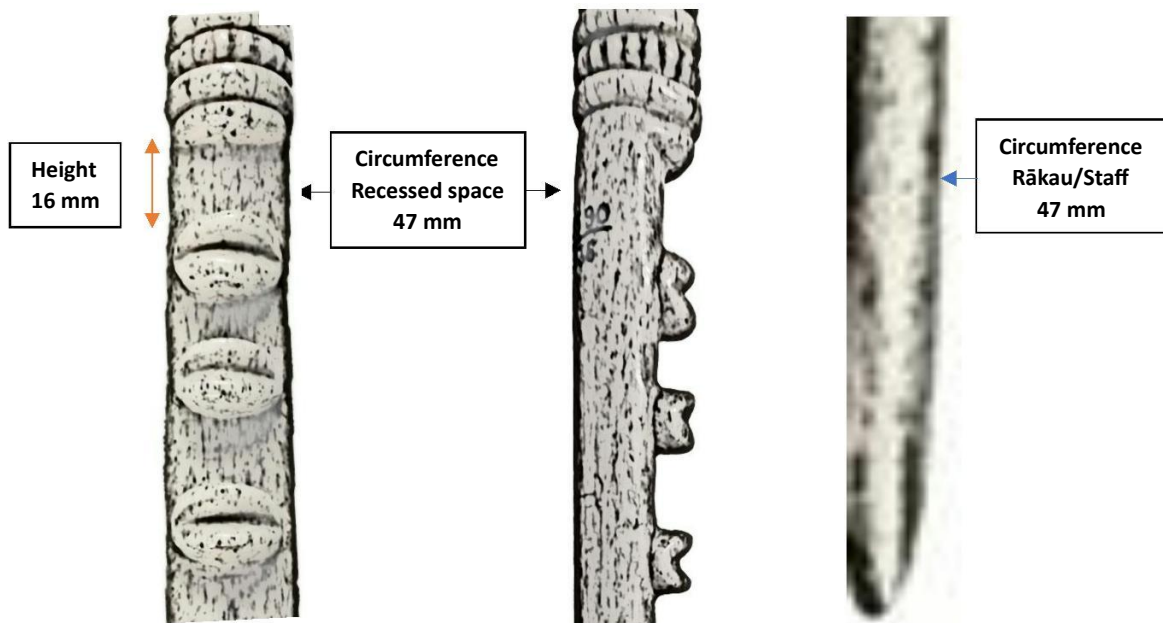
Length/Height



Circumference

The circumference at the *rae* (forehead) measures 58 mm. The circumference at the *karu* (eyes) measures 55 mm. The circumference measures 32 mm around the *kakī* (neck). The circumference around the *nga pokohiwi* (shoulders) measures 48 mm. The circumference around the *tinana* (body) including the arm, measures 38 mm. The circumference around the *nga waewae* (feet) at the centre, measures 31 mm. The circumference of the *rākau* itself measures 52 mm at the uppermost point where the *rauponga* ring is situated. It measures 43 mm in circumference at the middle point between the sets of *taratara* (scalloped notches). The circumference at its lower end measures 47 mm but tapers off to a point at the bottom.





Taimaha/Weight

This *taonga* weighs approximately 199 grams.

Rauemi/Materials

This *rākau whakapapa* has been carved entirely from *parāoa* (whalebone), the species of which at this stage, is unknown. Further examination by either a cetologist or osteologist may prove beneficial and determine what type of whale it originated from. It's origins as a living animal has been addressed in the *Tāhuhu Kōrero/Background Story* section on pages 9-10.



Right jawbone of a Sperm whale^{xi}

Tekoteko/humanoid figure representative of an ancestor

The human figure (often a *tekoteko*) at the top of a *rākau whakapapa* represents a primordial *tupuna*, a renowned ancestor of the tribe. This figure typically signifies the origin point of the lineage, overlooking the subsequent generations, and serves as a symbol of power, protection, and the source of *mana* (authority). This *tupuna* is performing a *whetero*, where the *arero* (tongue) is extended from the mouth in defiance and is viewed as a symbol of fearlessness and strength.



Right side view



Front view



Rear view

Ūpoko/Head

The *ūpoko* (head) measures 40 mm in length from the top to the bottom of the *waha* (mouth), with a circumference of 58 mm around the *rae* (forehead), and 55 mm around the *karu* (eyes). The height of the *rae* measures 14 mm. The length of the *ihu* (nose) measures 10 mm, and the length of the *arero* (tongue) measures 9 mm. The diameter of each *karu* is approximately 3 mm and they are spaced 6 mm apart.



Right side view



Front view



Rear view

Tinana/Body

The *tinana* (body) is quite basic, with no distinguishing features. It measures 30 mm in length. The left arm is held horizontally across the *poho* (chest), and the right arm is positioned by its right side. Both *ringaringa* (hands) have three fingers, with 8 mm between the top edge of the uppermost finger and the bottom edge of the lowermost finger of the hand that is held horizontally.



Right side view



Front view



Rear view



Right side view



Front view

Waewae/Legs

Both *waewae* (legs) are bowed and show no *turi* (knees), with the feet touching, and each foot having three *ngā kōiti* (toes). The *waewae* measure 25 mm in length, and the distance between the upper and lower *kōiti* of the right foot measures 6 mm in width.



Right side view

Front view

Rear view

Rākau/Staff

The *rākau* (staff) itself is delineated from the *tekoteko* (humanoid figure) by a ring of *rauponga* design, that measures 13 mm in height, with a circumference of 52 mm. The lowermost ring does not continue all the way around the *rākau*, only being present from the section where the recess in the front has been carved out.



Side view



Front view



Rear view

After the *rauponga* ring, there are a series of distinguishing features along the *rākau*, these being nineteen semicircular, scalloped protrusions down the front aspect of the *taonga*; each of the nineteen *taratara* (protruding knobs) having a horizontal slot carved into them, with what may be the beginning of a 20th not being fully completed at the bottom. These run from just below the *rauponga* ring to close to 2/3 of the way down the *rākau*.



A section of the *rākau* (staff) showing the protruding scalloped notches. What appears to be an unfinished *taratara* (notch).

The first and uppermost *taratara* (notched protrusion) sits 16 mm down from the *rauponga* ring, and has a circumference of 48 mm. There is a series of another 12 *taratara* with circumferences of: 51 mm, 49 mm, 49 mm, 47 mm, 49 mm, 50 mm, 50 mm, 50 mm, 48 mm, 48 mm, 47 mm, and 48 mm; before a small space measuring 26 mm, separates a final series of six *taratara*, with circumferences of: 46 mm, 47 mm, 44 mm, 44 mm, 43 mm, and 43 mm.



A series of 13 notches at the upper end of the *rākau*, separates a second series of 6 notches toward the lower end.

After the nineteenth or lowermost *taratara*, there is a 11 mm space with a circumference of 39 mm, before the resumption of a solid circular remainder of shaft with a circumference of 47 mm and measuring approximately 278 mm in length, with a tapered point.



The section of the *rākau*, showing the second set of *taratara*, and what may be the beginning of a 20th notch.



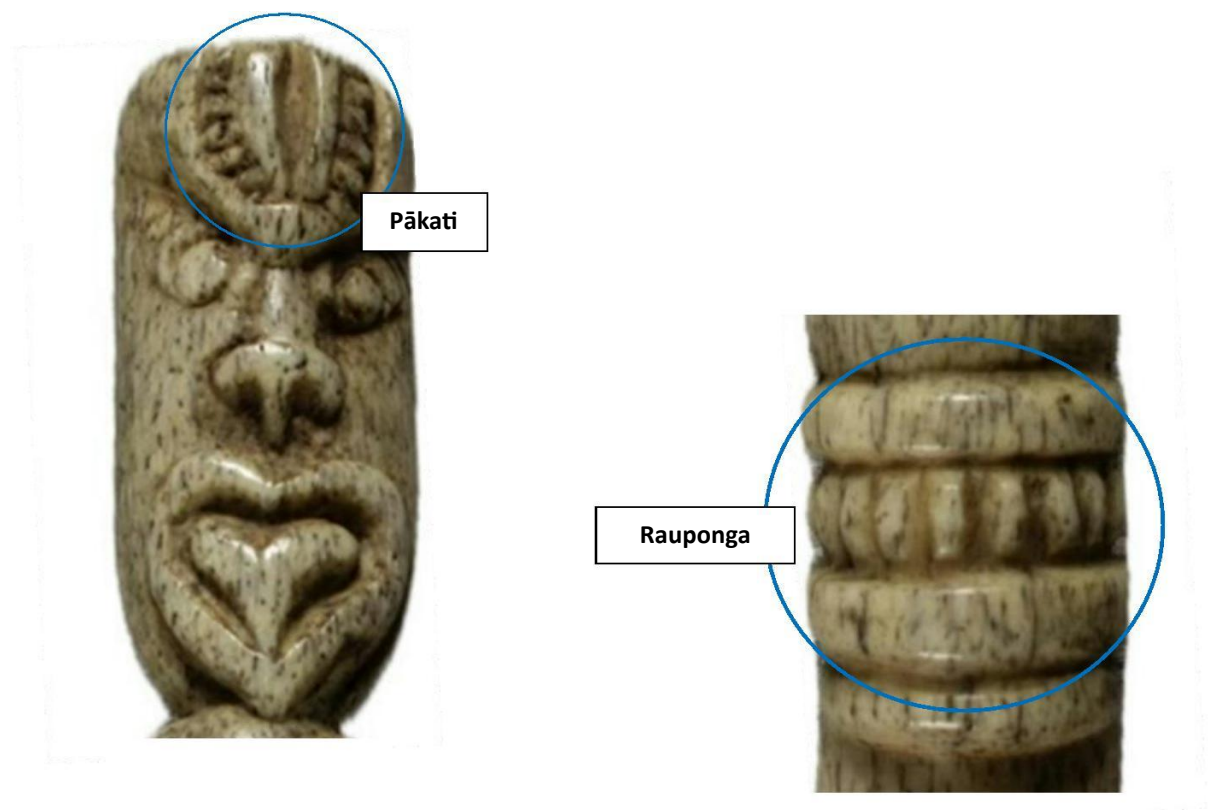
The lowermost section of the *rākau*, showing the tapered point.

Whakanakonako/Decorations and embellishments

The humanoid figure atop the *rākau whakapapa* is quite plain and bears no *whakarei* (carved surface designs) excepting a small portion of *pākati* on the *rae* (forehead) which serves as part of a *tāmoko* (traditional facial markings).

The only designs, other than the outlines of the *kanohi* (face): *karu* (eyes), *ihu* (nose), and *waha* (mouth), *tinana* (body), and *waewae* (legs), appear to be the ring around the *rākau* (staff) just beneath the *tekoteko* (humanoid figure), created utilising a *rauponga* design, being a combination of *haehae* and *pākati* (dog teeth) patterns. This ring measures 13 mm in height, and has a circumference of 52 mm.

The front of the *rākau* (staff) bears a series of *taratara* (small protruding knobs) in recessed area that is carved into the front, central aspect of the *rākau*.



Tukanga/Process

Māori crafting of *parāoa* (whale bone) objects involved ethically sourcing washed-up whales (a sacred *taonga*) and transforming it using traditional techniques and tools like *toki* (adzes), *uhi* (chisels), and *whao* (files) into powerful *taonga* (cultural treasures) for adornments such as *heru* (hair combs) or weaponry like *wahaika* and *patu* (hand clubs), or other objects such as this *rākau whakapapa*; infusing them with *mana* (spiritual power) and *whakapapa* (genealogical connection) through intricate carving, symbolizing strength, status, and ancestral links.

Traditionally, whalebone was sourced from stranded whales, however, today, carvers use legally obtained, old, washed-up bone. The bone is cleaned, often boiled, and dried in an upright position to allow oils to drain, which helps to properly age and prepare it for carving. A general shape is drawn directly onto the bone and is then cut to a rough shape using a saw (traditionally stone, now often jewellery saws). Historically, the shape was refined using stone or *toki pounamu* (greenstone adzes), chisels and finer tools for detailed work. *Whakarei* (surface carvings) often featuring traditional motifs like the *manaia* (spiritual guardian) were added. Finally, the carving was sanded down, often starting with coarse stone and moving to a slurry of extremely fine grits. It may then be buffed to a high sheen and sometimes oiled to bring out the grain.



Waiwharangi, a famed Whakatōhea *toki pounamu*.^{xii}



Greenstone adze.^{xiii}



Whao pounamu (pounamu chisel).^{xiv}



Pounamu whao.^{xv}



Old, bleached whale bones at a whaling station.^{xvi}

Pakarutanga/Condition

Overall, this *taonga* appears to be in quite good condition considering its age. There are minimal nicks and scratches, and no portions seem to be missing. The patina and discolouration are consistent with the age of the *taonga*. The black ink used to mark the accession designators may be permanent, staining the bone surface.



Whakaaturanga, Whakahaumarutanga rānei/Display, Storage

The *rākau whakapapa* lays in this draw (pictured below) with several other *taonga*, in a space where the conditions were 70.2F and 46%Rh at the time of examination. These are typical numbers for this space, and the storage room is very stable. Temp rarely varies by more than 1-2F, and Rh tends to stay between 45-55%.



Whakapapa/Provenance

As with all these historical and technical reports, the author is constantly looking to update or correct these whenever possible. The research process never ceases, even when a report is completed and provided to the respective institution.

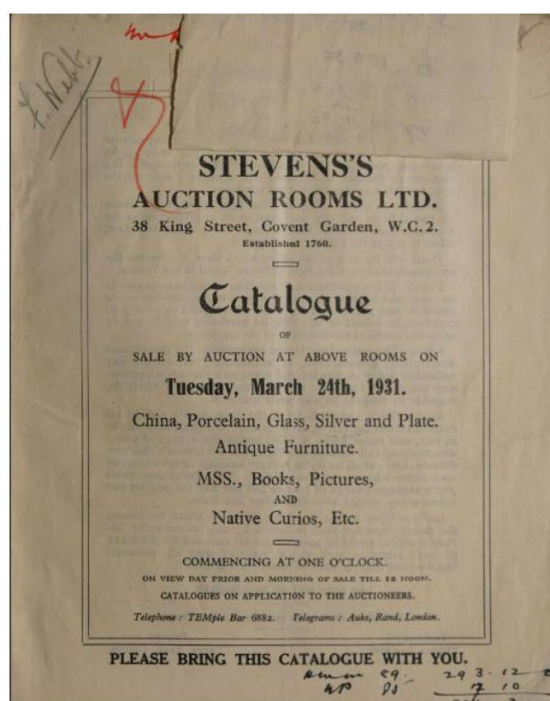
Kaitiaki/Custodian Unknown-1931

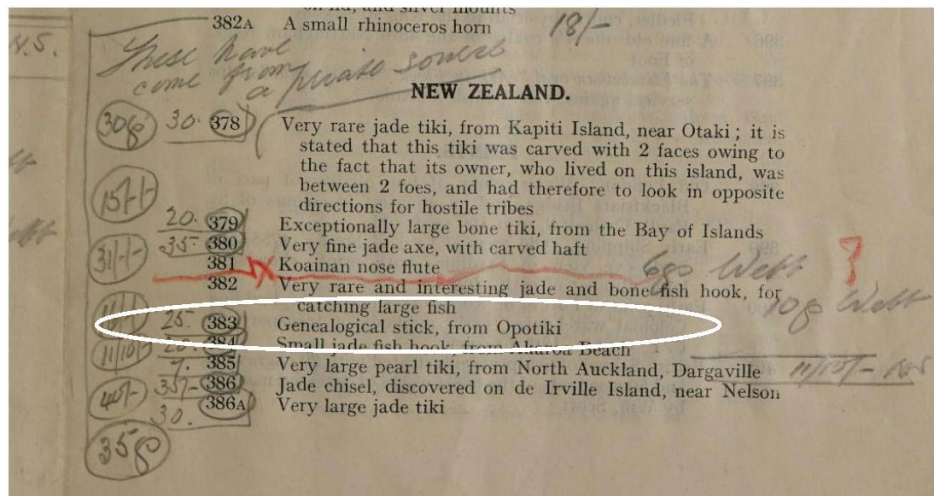
To date, ongoing research has proven fruitless regarding the *kaitiaki*/custodian of this *taonga* prior to 1931, with all available evidence leading to a *Stevens Auction Sales Catalogue* dated 24th March 1931.

Temporary Kaitiaki/Custodian March 1931 - Mr. Harry Stow

The temporary *kaitiaki*/custodian at this time was Mr. Harry Stow, who purchased this *taonga* at auction for £16 (written in pencil in the sales catalogue as, '16 I-I- Stow'), on behalf of Sir Henry Wellcome. Initially employed by Wellcome as a 'handyman', Stow became a trusted factotum for him at the *Wellcome Historical Medical Museum* (WHMM) from approximately 1908 to 1939, when he passed away on the 22nd July that year. He was described as a "right-hand man" in London, handling personal needs, unpacking collections, and directly purchasing items for Wellcome at auctions. Stow was also a research conduit, acting as a link between the salesrooms and Sir Henry, bringing back catalogues for Wellcome to study and mark for potential acquisition. Stow was known for his contributions to the museum's operations, including helping with the cataloguing of ethnographic material.

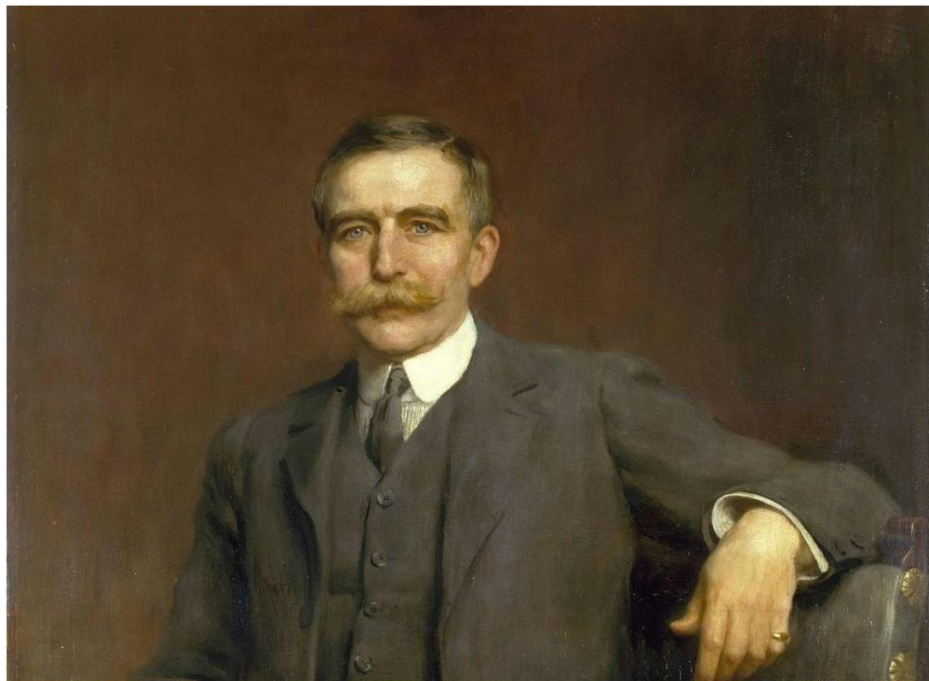
This *taonga* was bid on, and purchased by Stow, at a Stevens's auction at 38 King Street, Covent Garden in London on 24th March 1931, as lot 383. They were available for viewing on Monday, 23rd March, and up until 12:00 pm on the day of auction. The lot description is "*Genealogical stick, from Opotiki.*"





Sales catalogue – Stevens Auctions, 24th March 1931.^{xvii}

Kaitiaki/Custodian 1931-1936 – Sir Henry Wellcome



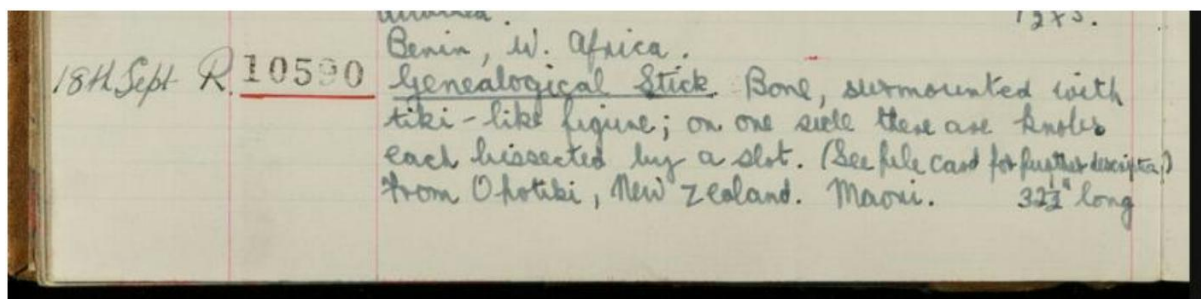
Hugh Goldwin Rivière, Henry Solomon Wellcome, three-quarter length, 1906, Oil on canvas, Wellcome Collection, London.

Sir Henry Wellcome (1853–1936) was an American-born British pharmaceutical entrepreneur, philanthropist, and obsessive collector who co-founded Burroughs Wellcome & Co. He amassed over one million items, including medical, cultural, and historical artifacts, aiming to create a comprehensive "Museum of Man". His collections were respected for their vast scope, documenting humanity's relationship with health across cultures, and for pioneering archaeological work. Wellcome employed people (such as Harry Stow) to attend auctions and scour antiquities stores across the United Kingdom, and Europe, for items of cultural and historical interest.

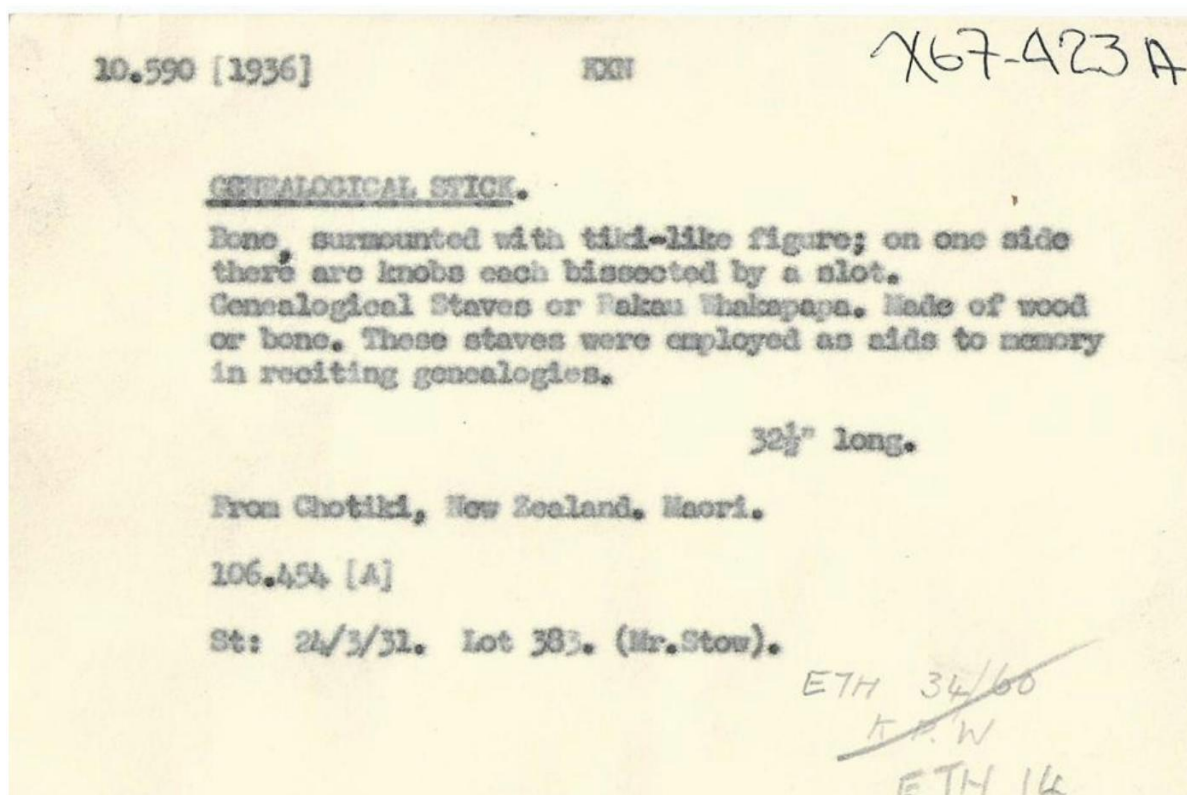
His Pacific collections were respected for their vast scale and systematic documentation of daily life.

Kaitiaki/Custodian 1936-1967 Wellcome Trust (Wellcome Historical Medical Museum)

This entry R10590 in the Wellcome Museums accession register below, is evidence that this *rākau whakapapa* (genealogical staff) was recorded as being part of those collections.^{xviii}



The file card below (also shown on page 17), provides additional information about this *taonga*.



Kaitiaki/Custodian 1967-Present – Fowler Museum, University of California Los Angeles (UCLA)

The Fowler Museum has been the *kaitiaki* (custodian) of this *taonga* since at least 1967, when it was accessioned to this institution at that time. The Wellcome Collection objects were sent ‘...in a series of consignments from February 1965 until early 1967.’^{xix} The identifier card above, from the Wellcome Collection, accompanied this *rākau whakapapa* when it was acquired by the Fowler in 1967.

Unfortunately, without any documentation, and with no additional leads prior to the Stevens Auctions Sales Catalogue, tracing this *taonga* further than 1931 has proven difficult. As with all *taonga* researched by the author, these reports are continually updated or corrected if the author learns of corrections in the future.

Hītoritanga/Publication History

No published works could be found regarding this *taonga* except for the Stevens' sales catalogue in 1931.

Ngā tuhinga a te kaituhituhi/Author's notes

When I was initially informed of the existence of this *taonga*, I was excited for several reasons. Firstly, as the *whakapapa* traces this to our Te Whakatōhea *iwi*, and that is another of our *taonga* out in *te ao* (the world) that has been identified and we now know its location. Secondly, until now, this *taonga* has not been visited by, and greeted by any *uri* (descendants) or *whanaunga* (relatives) in over a century and has now been found by its people. Thirdly, it represents nearly half a millennium of Te Whakatōhea tribal genealogy, and this could possibly include some of the author's *tupuna* (ancestors). I see a resemblance between the series of *taratara* (protruding notches) and *waha* (mouths), each *taratara* looking like a set of *ngutu* (lips) from which *pūrākau* (stories) and *hītori* (history) might be spoken. Māori academic Wiremu Puke (Ngāti Wairere) suggests that the *taratara*, due to their shape, may represent *teke* (vaginas) from which each generation is born.^{xx}

Whakahokinga mai/Repatriation

I am not always an advocate of repatriation, believing that unless the *taonga* is historically significant, or unique (none exist in Aotearoa New Zealand), or it is the best example of a specific type of object; they better serve as vessels to provide links between the institutions who are the current *kaitiaki* (custodians) and Aotearoa New Zealand and Māori culture. In this case, because of what it represents, being the genealogical record of our people, representing several *tūpuna* (ancestors), and having had several *kaitiaki*; if ever there was a *taonga* that I feel should be reunited with, and returned to its people and home, it is this *rākau whakapapa*.

A precedence has been set by the Fowler, with the repatriation of sacred Aboriginal objects to their peoples in 2024 and 2025, when cultural objects were returned to the Warumungu, and Larrakia peoples respectively. When repatriating cultural objects to the Larrakia (Saltwater People), whose Country includes the modern-day city of Darwin in the Northern Territory, in May 2025, Silvia Forni, Shirley & Ralph Shapiro Director, Fowler Museum, stated that:

'Museums play a vital role in acknowledging past wrongs and fostering meaningful cultural exchange. The return of these objects reinforces our dedication to ethical stewardship and deepens our partnerships with Indigenous communities. This repatriation is part of a growing global movement to return cultural heritage to its rightful custodians, ensuring that these materials can once again contribute to the cultural and spiritual practices of their communities.'^{xxi}

What could be better than for Te Whakatōhea to share our cultural history and artwork to the world at the Fowler Museum by way of the *Te Uhengaparaoa* exhibition (scheduled for October 2026 – March 2027), and to then return home with a *taonga* that is a physical manifestation of our *tūpuna* from the same institution – that would mean so much to our people.

Rārangi pukapuka/Bibliography-End Notes

- ⁱ Bradford Haami, 'Te whānau puha – whales', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/te-whanau-puha-whales> (accessed 24 January 2026).
- ⁱⁱ Rāwiri Taonui, 'Canoe navigation - Locating land', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/photograph/2228/paieka-the-whale-rider> (accessed 25 January 2026).
- ⁱⁱⁱ <https://whalewatch.co.nz/our-people/indigenous-kiwi-and-paieka/> (accessed 25 January 2026).
- ^{iv} Scamperdown whale. https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Mesoplodon_grayi_2.jpg (accessed 25 January 2026).
- ^v Minke whale. <https://voicesinthesea.ucsd.edu/species/baleenWhales/minke.html> (accessed 25 January 2026).
- ^{vi} Humpback whale. <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/humpback-whale> (accessed 25 January 2026).
- ^{vii} Sperm whale. <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/sperm-whale> (accessed 25 January 2026).
- ^{viii} Te AARA The Encyclopedia of New Zealand. Te Whakatōhea tribal are. <https://teara.govt.nz/en/map/379/te-whakatohea-tribal-area> (accessed 24 January 2026).
- ^{ix} Opotiki Holiday Park. <https://www.opotikiholidaypark.co.nz/> (accessed 27 January 2026).
- ^x Wellcome Collection website. Sales catalogue: Stevens. 24 March 1931, p. 19. WA/HMM/CM/Sal/21/700. Wellcome Historical Medical Museum and Library <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/vrxrysn2> (accessed 18th December 2025).
- ^{xi} 'Sperm whale jaw found on north coast trail'. Facebook post by Stefan JB. August 12, 2025, on the Field Naturalists of Vancouver Island (FNVI) page. <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=10172048627485182&set=pcb.1840809039831943> (accessed 3rd January 2026).
- ^{xii} Te Ara The Encyclopedia of New Zealand. Story: Te Whakatōhea. Waiwharangi, the greenstone adze. <https://teara.govt.nz/en/photograph/386/waiwharangi-the-greenstone-adze> (accessed 24 January 2026).
- ^{xiii} Rāwiri Taonui, Canoe traditions – Canoes of Bay of Plenty, Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/object/2336/greenstone-adze> (accessed 24 January 2026).
- ^{xiv} Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Whao pounamu (nephrite chisel, hafted). <https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/132107?page=1&rtp=1&ros=1&asr=1&assoc=all&mb=c>
- ^{xv} Caters price guide to antiques. <https://www.carters.com.au/index.cfm/item/1384547-three-18th-century-or-earlier-small-greenstone-whao-chisel-two-o/> (accessed 24 January 2026).
- ^{xvi} Photo courtesy of Ernie Janes.
- ^{xvii} Wellcome Collection website. Sales catalogue: Stevens. WA/HMM/CM/Sal/21/700. Wellcome Historical Medical Museum and Library <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/vrxrysn2> (accessed 18th December 2025).
- ^{xviii} Museum accessions register Vol 12: 9371/1936-10860/1936. Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0). Source: Wellcome Collection. Aug-Sep 1936. Reference: WA/HMM/CM/Acc/32. Wellcome Historical Medical Museum and Library. <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/eqjnvqgx/items?canvas=248> (accessed 26 January 2026).
- ^{xix} Correspondence. Letter between Dr. P.O. Williams and Richard de Peyer, dated 7 January 1982, referring to UCLA Gift.
- ^{xx} Electronic correspondence (Messenger) between the author and Wiremu Puke on 25 January 2026.
- ^{xxi} Fowler Museum returns 11 objects of deep spiritual and cultural importance to the Larrakia people. AIATSIS. News. <https://aiatsis.gov.au/whats-new/news/fowler-museum-returns-11-objects-deep-spiritual-and-cultural-importance-larrakia> (accessed 23 January 2025).

Tūtohu/Sign Off

Ingoa/Name:

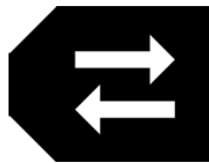
Brent Kerehona Pukepuke-Ahitapu BA. MTeach
Historian I Author I Cultural Practitioner

Tohu/Signature:

Rā/Date: 26 January 2026

Appendix 1: Traditional Knowledge Labels

The Traditional Knowledge (TK) Labels are an initiative for Indigenous communities and local organizations. Developed by Local Contexts through sustained partnership and testing within Indigenous communities across multiple countries, the Labels allow communities to express local and specific conditions for sharing and engaging in future research and relationships in ways that are consistent with already existing community rules, governance and protocols for using, sharing and circulating knowledge and data. Whakatōhea have customised TK Labels for their community context and have applied them to this report.



TK Attribution (TK A) | Whakapuaki

Label Text | English

This Label is being used to correct historical mistakes or exclusions pertaining to this material. This is especially in relation to the names of the people involved in performing or making this work and/or correctly naming the community from which it originally derives. As a user you are being asked to also apply the correct attribution in any future use of this work. Acknowledge all information sources to ensure the mana and integrity of the information and the indigenous community of Whakatōhea is upheld

Whakapuaki | Māori

He tapanga e tohu ana ki te whakatika o te taonga tuku iho nei. He whakatika i te Kaitito, i te Mana Whenua, i te Rohe. Kia whai tikanga, ki te mōhio koe ki te kōrero tika, pono rānei me tono. Me whakamana, me whakanui, me whakapai i te mōhiotanga me te rohe taketake o Te Whakatōhea.



TK Community Use Only (TK CO) | Mā Te Hāpori Anake

Label Text | English

This Label is being used to indicate that this taonga is not, and never was, free, public, or available for everyone at anytime. The Label indicates that there are protocols and permissions for use and has specific conditions for circulation within Te Whakatōhea. This material should only be used by Te Whakatōhea members or with the expressed permission of Te Taumata Kaumātua.

Mā te Hāpori Anake | Māori

E tohu ana te tapanga nei ki te Mana Motuhake o te taonga nei, kua kore rawatia e tuku noa, ahakoa ko wai koe. He mana tōna, he tikanga tōna, kia whai tika i tōna tukuna atu i roto i Te Whakatōhea. Mā Te Whakatōhea anake! Kia whakaae Te Taumata Kaumātua.



TK Non-Commercial (TK NC) | Umanga Kore

Label Text | English

This material is not available for commercial use. You are allowed to use this material for non-commercial purposes including for research, study, or public presentation and/or online in blogs or non-commercial websites. This Label asks you to think and act with fairness and responsibility towards this material and Te Whakatohea.

Umanga Kore | Māori

Kāre mō te arumoni. Hēoi anō mō te rangahau, te akoako, te kauhau, te whakaaturanga, te wānanga. Otirā, kia tika, kia pono te takea mai i ngā whakaaro mō te manaaki me te ārai o te taonga nei me te iwi o Te Whakatōhea.