

Customising your Classic Whareniui: Conservation and Adaptation of Marae Heritage Buildings

**Te Paerangi National Seminar
Rotorua
March 4-5, 2008**

Thank you for the opportunity to come speak with you today. I'm very pleased to be here to join this important discussion regarding how to better care for our treasured taonga, but importantly strengthen our identity and cultural sustainability for the future. When I first discussed this presentation with Rhonda a couple of months ago, we talked about the potential of marae to participate in the development of cultural centres, in particular how smaller scale whare taonga have worked, and how these adaptations can be done while still retaining the heritage and cultural values of marae. However I found that in the process of trying to get a better understanding what the relationship and impact might be of a cultural centre development around a Maori community, I could see that there was more to ask rather than answer? Would they be a supportive model, given the given the current position and condition of Marae built heritage?

When we talk of our primary Maori cultural institution from a hapu, iwi or even whanau perspective, I would assume that marae would come to most people's minds first. Our national spend on heritage institutional servicing runs into the tens of millions, thinking of the regional and national museum / archives budgets combined, and apportioning out what you might think as spend on Maori collections. When we consider this, how much are we spending on marae based heritage, specifically on marae based collections and building heritage? A few hundred thousand possibly would be the range we are talking I sense.

Interesting to contrast this with the Department of Statistics and the Ministry of Culture and Heritage 2005 report 'A Measure of Culture: Cultural experiences and cultural spending in New Zealand', says for experiences of Maori culture this:

"Of the three Maori cultural activities experienced during the 12-month reference period, the most popular was visiting a marae, with 543,000 people, or one in five New Zealand adults, having done this. The next most popular activity was viewing exhibitions of taonga, with 447,000 people, or 16 percent of adults, doing so, by 390,000 people (14 percent of the adult population) who visited historical sites of special significance to Maori (wahi taonga)."

Even with this rough comparison, the cultural dollar spend is disproportionate – vastly, on average most New Zealanders, mostly Maori, visit marae as their primary Maori cultural experience. How is it that we resource it disproportionately less? Would cultural centre development take more or could it give more given marae are primary cultural experience?

Maori communities are also facing their own challenges in maintaining heritage on marae. You might have thought that decay, weathering, and borer etc were the biggest issues; something that a technical solution might solve however these are often symptoms not causes of a building's condition. The root cause is often more about how a building is used, how it's maintained, and how it is resourced, the support services that surround it and so on.

There are some immediate and pressing concerns.

The first is the alarming increase in the incidence of fire on marae. Averages from the fire service statistics show that over five marae per year are lost or damaged from fire. The uptake on sprinklers has been encouraging but slow. Cost is an extremely prohibitive barrier with average installation costs around \$50,000- \$90,000 and on going maintenance costs \$3500 per annum. Difficult costs for communities to front, but even more difficult for funding bodies to support, a modest uptake of 100 marae installations would be in the vicinity of at least 5-9 million.

Second is the backlog of deferred maintenance. Generally funding streams for marae are erratic, and under funded over all. Repairs and maintenance are often done in an ad hoc manner, They do from time to time

get large capital expenditure funding, but for day to day maintenance, administration support, and specialist advice very little. Over time we get large funding proposals to fix cumulative deferred maintenance on buildings. Historic buildings / artwork on marae suffer from this, solutions in new proposals tend to replace rather than retain, to replace with what are seen as more durable material to essentially make things more resilient against another long cycle of deferred maintenance, and so it continues. Examples of weatherboard buildings replaced with concrete block walls, carvings replaced and buried, buildings demolished and replaced.

And thirdly simply too much is left to so few, nga ahi ka.

Although I have painted a somewhat bleak picture, and cast a adversarial shadow, I think it is important to highlight the issues of marae preservation currently, when planning, strategising new initiatives such as an iwi cultural centres as more collaborative and supportive ventures.

But first let us look at the question; are marae culture centres, do they have the potential or capacity to be cultural centres? Without getting into definitions of what constitutes a cultural centre I would say yes, marae are a type of cultural centre.

Marae are a unique form of collective association, a strong institution, not only for the physical functions needed to support the collective, but a cultural entity in itself, with values related to landscapes, spiritualism, and cultural continuance through whakapapa. They operate in a dynamic way, scaling appropriately to a given event or purpose, an ebb and flow of people depending on need. This is the basis for their success, a longevity around an ability to adapt and change, but a continuity of core values and practice. A flexible operational base.

A whareniui in its self is a complete concept, a self contained expression of art, a clear purpose understood through a cultural framework. These are places that show the intent of the carved, painted, and woven art forms as interrelated expressions. The buildings themselves can also show this legacy of adaptation, of European and Maori architectural forms, building construction that draws on the local knowledge and resources, the movements of whole communities.

So what are some examples of whare taonga on marae, this capacity to go beyond our general understanding of marae function. Marae too can contain important collections, the ones we are familiar with are the photographic images of tupuna, painted works, hung on the walls of the whareniui. Other items include generations of weaving, whariki kept inside often laid flat on the floor, korowai, flags, taonga stored in cabinets. Larger collections have also been accommodated in additional building spaces. I have three examples, one of a large collection, the accommodation of a whole whareniui, and thirdly the accommodation of a taonga repatriated back to a marae. What I would like you to think about is the intent of these collections or taonga on marae, why are they there.

The first example I have is at Koroniti marae up the Wanganui river. A small whare taonga, known as Hikurangi, was built in 1975 to accommodate taonga from the marae community, including carvings of a dismantled whareniui, Poutama from across the river. As you can see there is a range of material on display, photographs, carvings, adzes, hinaki, waka, a sewing machine. The kaupapa of this space was to display and keep taonga that belonged to that community for the benefit of that community. Of course from time to time visitors from outside would see these displays, but you would assume that the interpretation would more often be provided by those showing, guiding, manuhiri through the space.

The second is the whare taonga for Tanewhirinaki whareniui, Waioeka marae, Whakatohea. This whareniui was originally constructed at Waioeka marae in the 1880's. Its reconstruction in the thirties resulted in the deaths of one of the builders and after a storm collapsed the building the whare was deemed tapu. The building were stored under iron and make shift sheds, until 1980 this storage building was constructed for the 138 carvings. Access is very limited to manage concerns over the tapu nature of these taonga. Essentially this is what would considered a cultural store, a keeping place, not so much to be displayed or interpreted, but a place to maintain cultural safety.

Thirdly Maungaroa Marae, Te Kaha, Te Whanau a Apanui. The whale boat Ngutuwaera, "the greyhound" was displayed at the Gisborne Museum until the late 1980's when it was return to our hapu Te Whanau a Kaiiao. This boat essentially built our marae from the proceeds of whale oil. In fact once the waharoa was built from the ribs of a whale, the paepae seat those of the vertebrae. They have all gone now. Today it housed in a shelter on the marae atea. A constant reminder of our legacy, a passage in our history. The interpretative panel above the boat says 'please do not climb in the boat'.

Given all of these marae seem to have accommodated some capacity of collection care, interpret and communicate values and knowledge through their own cultural frameworks, they certainly provide a level of function around a cultural centre concept. However the audience they communicate too is generally themselves and this seems to be the key question is what audience is it intended for, public, private, or both? Marae tend to fall into the category of private as we have explored with these examples. They are a self sustaining, purposeful in centring a hapu, iwi identity relative to other hapu / iwi. The knowledge and understanding passed through a cultural framework such as wananga, whaikorero, and whanau korero. But I think cultural centres are trying to communicate both ways, internally and externally. They have a wider range of outcomes related to economic, educational aspirations, an interface that works better on a larger scale. But are they a version of marae, super marae? Would the creation of one change the dynamic, relationship of hapu to their taonga? I certainly know that if Ngutuwaera was to move to say a cultural centre, our tangible link to our history would be compromised. However if the story of whaling on the coast was explained at a centre, then a tour brought to the marae, then maybe the mana of our story would be maintained, the mana of our hapu maintained.

So given that you have debated the merits of housing a collection, taonga on your marae, or have negotiated a relationship outside of your marae to bring taonga in, what are some of the considerations for the physical care. The wharenui has limited capacity beyond the its own decorative features , photographs, painted works hung on walls are what we generally see, some taonga in cabinets, whariki. The overall the protective envelope of the building can be improved to reduce fluctuations in environment,

- Firstly make it water tight.
- Structurally sound
- Improve insulation.
- Improve ventilation
- Sprinklers and electrical upgrade
- Reduce light levels.
- Have clear guidelines for those using the space.
- Better hanging fixtures and protection to underlying artwork
- Have a maintenance plan for the building and someone in charge of it.
- Have a disaster plan for the building and contents
- Security
- Regular checks on taonga
- Programme of insect eradication

All of these should be planned and designed through a conservation plan process. This is to ensure that the heritage / cultural values of the building and marae through this work are maintained. Issues of retention vs replacement, types of materials and building techniques that are sympathetic to original work. Generally conservation plans are prepared by a conservator / conservation architect, who also draw on expertise of engineers, and you, to develop the detail and options to both retain the integrity of the wharenui, and also integrate the additional function to the building. A conservator would also survey the collection and artwork features of the building, assessing condition, treatment work, storage or display considerations within the context of marae environment. All of this is an open consultative process, hui, hui, hui, to ensure that the solutions that are decided on are acceptable and workable. Whilst improvements to the building will help the environment for the display of taonga, it is very difficult to bring such a space into a museum range of environmental control without a large investment in air-conditioning plant this is usually not a practical option because of cost. Importantly you should be thinking about reducing the highs and lows of environmental extremes, and if material is very fragile, consider purpose built storage, or off site storage, ie museum / cultural centre. Generally wood based taonga is more robust than we think, but the extreme dry

(crack inducing) and wet (mould inducing) do have a marked influence on cultural material longevity. For fibre light and storage technique is the biggest determinant of preservation.

If the collection or items are large, then a purpose building is probably more the solution. Again environmental plant is not usually practical for cost reasons. Ideally the building should have a large capacity to provide passive environmental control. Generally heavily insulated designs, or utilising thermal mass of earth, concrete, or stone. Now here is where there is a lot of potential to explore some of our own technology in this area, our matauranga. The knowledge that developed around storing kumara was extensive but effective in maintaining what was essentially a tropical tuber in a temperate climate. Rua are an excellent example of passive environmental control, as are our traditional wharepuni, where utilising the thermal mass and insulation qualities of the whenua to maintain temperature and by association humidity. There are examples of this type of thinking in the sustainable design models, but there is a great potential to explore this further into taonga storage facilities also from our own matauranga base. Again in engaging in developing these sorts of designs, its important that it is designed within a wider conservation plan framework, to ensure scale, aspect, material types, relationships to landscape are all considered to uphold the heritage and cultural values of the marae. Also the specialist expertise of a preventative conservator, and engineering consultancy who have had success in this area.

But the important provision that needs to be built into the overall plan is maintenance, not only of the buildings but of the collection. This requires on going support of specialists, budget to repair and maintain, monitoring of environment, periodic eradication of insects and so on. It requires a lot of marae administration in particular someone with a role to look after these things. This is often the most difficult aspect to have in place for the long term, and the one that needs external support often.

So just to summarise again.

The first point is that one of our living cultural institutions, marae are vulnerable, vulnerable in the sense of their heritage buildings and collections. There is a possibility that they could compete for resources against a limited funding pool if we don't consider cultural centre initiatives along side our current heritage needs.

The second is that there is potential and capacity for marae to fulfil some "cultural centre function". We have examples of marae who have simply accommodated collections with the addition of purpose designed buildings. Small to medium whare taonga for a marae is achievable and able to sustain itself within the infrastructure of a marae administration given some consistent external support. Which brings me to my last point.

The key across this broad theme of cultural and heritage sustainability is investment in people. What I have been trying to promote here is that marae have particular strengths in relating to their constituents. As hapu cultural centres marae are self sustaining in many ways, they often have incredible legacy of arts, architecture, collections, matauranga Maori, but they struggle to maintain them. Cultural centre development needs to ensure that the relationship to each hapu and marae is a supportive and collaborative. A great advantage of a larger region entity such as a cultural centre, is it could have the capacity, the threshold to umbrella a number of programmes that support hapu in preserving their heritage, and a way to reciprocate a meaningful relationship that strengthens both.

Some ideas to illustrate this further here are some ideas:

Archive / Matauranga Marae support

Marae based archives are difficult given the changing nature of marae administration. A cultural centre that supports marae by offering archive capacity, not only for photographic material, documents, but the administration and records of marae. Also an active programme of oral recording, photographic recording for marae and historic sites.

Conservation Support

Cultural centres might have a function to assist hapu in developing conservation programmes that can work with clusters of marae, contracting in the necessary experts to run programmes under the umbrella of the centre, training and encouraging their own people into professional

level careers. This could also be a cross agency / cross iwi programme that enables more regional service delivery of expertise, and resources. Applying leverage for sprinkler systems, conservation materials, paint, etc to reduce costs.

Maintenance planning and support

Running programmes for marae and even support maintenance contracts to assist marae with this difficult but important area. Pooling of resources to assist marae, example scaffolding for maintenance work, specialist equipment, e.g. monitoring equipment. A position within a cultural centre to support this. Disaster response equipment, planning and training.

Marae as Exhibition Venues

Marae are part of a wider exhibitions programme, a cultural centre as a hub. A cultural centre might be more of a coordinative body that runs exhibitions out of marae. A centre without walls that utilises existing marae as venues develops relationships with local and national cultural institutions for exhibition and event platforms, develops digital collections. Again another platform to invigorate matauranga I a marae.

Sustainable Cultural Resource Programmes

Developing cultural resources for use in arts and traditional building construction and repair and creation. Examples is the development of plantation forests of totara for cultural use, toitoi, harakeke and so on.

A whare taonga

A place for taonga that need to be better stored under high level environmental control, or for security reasons, or to connect taonga, to tell stories as collectives.

So I hope I have come back to the opportunities but shown you they can really only thrive if there is a strong relationship between cultural centre and marae. As others have said the key is planning and consultation, getting the right experts to be involved, understanding what you want, these are very long term goals. But I hope you have also taken on board a pressing concern to support our few whanau out there who work hard to maintain our marae, our manawa. No reira whakamana te marae, whakamana te iwi.