

Feeling Connected by Getting Involved

With so much movement of families away from their ancestral homes, it is easy to feel a sense of loss and transience. Getting involved in a local project with local people may engender that sense of connectivity, that link with history, that affirmation that we are only passing through and that we should endeavour to leave the world a better place (for having been here).

I was born in Melbourne and my heart remains firmly bound to that city. My first ten years were spent there and that is the seat of my whakapapa/my genealogy.

However I have ended up living in NZ (for the past 50 years!) and we have moved around a lot.

In 1993 we bought a property at the southern end of Lake Taupo. This has become the family bolt-hole. But more than that for me as I was drawn to get involved in a project that would give not only the opportunity to connect with the local Maori people but also to help restore an historic building. I guess my father has surreptitiously instilled in me a sense of history and I came from a line of Anglican missionaries so it was inevitable that I was drawn to see the restoration completed of St Paul's Church Tokaanu which was erected in 1902 as a memorial church to the Rev Samuel Thomas Grace and his wife, Agnes. Grace worked in the surrounding areas for eight years. He established good relations with the local Ngati Tuwharetoa and was used as an advisor during the decision making to establish the first National Park in New Zealand and the Maori King movement.

The restoration process started with an article in the local paper to say a restoration was envisaged. 'Out of the woodwork' came an immediate offer to re-roof the church for nothing. A funding application to the local gaming trust gave us the money to re-tile and rewire the church and mitigation money from a local power company gave us enough to carry out the internal restoration. With the expertise of the conservation architect from the Historic Places Trust of NZ the ten year restoration process was underway.

I have learnt so much about how Maori people do things (by consultation), what is important them (patience and respect) and how to work within the confines of expert advice, be it colour, carpeting, bell pulls or piling. The inside walls of the church are intricately decorated with tukutuku paneling and kowhaiwhai paintings. The new East stained glass window has been designed by a local Maori artist to reflect the Holy Trinity as associated with the nearby volcanoes and Lake Taupo.

While the church like many has a falling patronage, at Christmas and Easter it is filled to bursting with holiday makers and much gratitude is expressed that we have 'saved' this local icon (on a shoe string budget and good will).



Maori decoration of the interior of St Paul's Memorial Church, Tokaanu. Consecrated in 1908, the church by the 21st Century was badly in need of repair. (Photo: Lorraine Grace.)





