

GISBORNE MUSEUM

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WITH THE AUTHOR'S COMPLIMENTS.

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Burial-house.

BY

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Extracted from the *New Zealand Journal of Science and Technology*, Vol. XIII,
No. 2, p. 78, 1931.

WELLINGTON, N.Z.

W. A. G. SKINNER, GOVERNMENT PRINTER.

1931.

MANUTUKA, AN ANCIENT MAORI BURIAL-HOUSE.

By W. J. PHILLIPPS, F.L.S.

ABOUT six years ago Mrs. Woodbine Johnson, whose maiden name was Meri Tutira, and who is a member of the Rongowhakaata Tribe, supplied me with an interesting account of the once-famous building at Hurimoana in which the bones of the great fighting chiefs of the district were deposited. As a young lady Mrs. Johnson had visited the house in 1868, but even then it was long past its best, for the timbers were rapidly rotting away.

Hurimoana was nine miles from the town now known to us as Gisborne. The house was more or less circular in shape, being about 50 ft. in circumference. Totara had been the only wood used in its erection. The roof was covered with large quantities of raupo. The only binding-material used was aka, a bush tendril much stronger than flax-fibre. Periodically the house was visited by parties of Natives, who, as soon as crevices appeared, stuffed them with feathers of pigeon, those of the breast only being used, the idea being to have the place perfectly airtight. The outside of the house was carved.

Inside there were some thirty small compartments, in each of which there lay on the ground a closed chest made in the shape of a canoe. These burial-chests were of two shapes. One kind had a curved head attached to one end after the manner of a war-canoe, while the other kind was apparently more of the shape of a food-bowl. These were regarded by the Natives as objects specially manufactured for purposes of burial, and averaged from 5 ft. to 8 ft. in length. My informant seemed quite certain that the shape suggested a canoe more than anything else.

The bones only were placed in the chests, and previous to the time of the grandfather of Mrs. Johnson at least five direct ancestors of her family had been buried there. This grandfather, whose name was Tawheo (Pohatu), was seventy years ago the greatest of the fighting chiefs of the district. His great battles, in order, were Uawa, Maramatawhana, Terotoatara (near Te Aute College), and Te Pukenui (near Mahia Peninsula), the last two engagements being with the Ngatiporou.

A chief whose bones finally were placed in an ancestral burial-chest at Manutuka became most strictly *tapu*, and could seldom be removed therefrom. Tawheo was buried standing, as became so great a warrior. As the building fell gradually into disrepair the bones of ancestors were removed to another spot. The highly *tapu* carvings connected with this building were never sold, but rotted away.

We are aware of the use of burial-chests in North Auckland, which remained secret until comparatively recently; and it seems certain that matters connected with burial chests and customs were well guarded. There is to-day a cave at the entrance to a harbour in the north which contains wooden burial-chests, but the secret of its existence has been so well guarded that very few settlers have ever heard of it, while those who have attempted to find it have been turned back by the Maoris.

Recent excavations near the Pyramids of Cairo have revealed a canoe-shaped vault in which lay the body of the queen of Cheops. Originally the canoe-shaped structure would be definitely associated with the world-wide idea of a journey which the spirit must make across water after death, and the Maoris certainly had this idea.