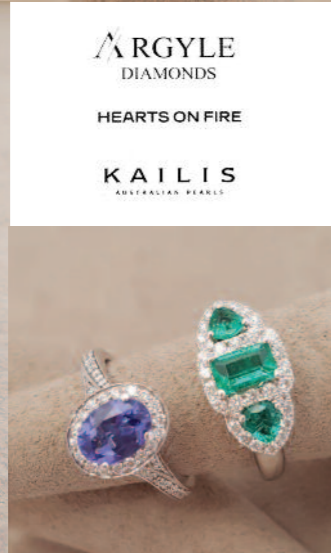




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REGIONAL HISTORY



PHOTOGRAPH OF TAMATI WAKA NENE, 1856 OR 1860, BY JOHN CROMBIE.

attention by telling them that Waikoto was immensely tall and Hongi even taller, perhaps the tallest men the English had ever seen — though not as tall as one of Hongi's cousins, chief Tareha, who was over seven feet tall.

"Do you know how tall that is?" The students get involved in guessing. (Up to the roof? Half way up the wall ...?)

"And do you know how I know this?" asks the orator.

From a recycled plastic shopping bag he withdraws a feathered cloak. He ties it over one shoulder. "King George gave my ancestor many gifts, including a suit of armour, and my ancestor took off his ceremonial cloak and folded it and left it at the King's feet. It was at Carlton House, in London. The problem is, the King didn't like Carlton House and he had it knocked down. Then no one was sure what happened to all the gifts he had inside.

"When I decided to try and find the cloak, I looked at every possible digitised image in the British Museum, but it wasn't there. I was despairing. I didn't have the resources to search the dark recesses of the archives myself. I asked the museum staff to tell me if by chance something came to light. Sometime later, to my amazement, the cloak was found. So I can tell from the measurements that my ancestor was six feet four or five."

Hongi stayed in England for a time after meeting the King. He made a deal with a Frenchman, Baron Charles de Thiery, offering him territory on the North Island in return for crate loads of muskets. It was enough land for the Frenchman to stake a claim for sovereignty. The only problem was that the territory on offer to the Frenchman was the tribal land of Chief Te Rauparaha, whose photograph is on the opposite wall.

I turn to study the wall of 19th century photographs of Maori ancestors, some named and some anonymous.

My sister's phone alarm starts to buzz. Time's up for my car, but I shake my head at her. I would rather be fined than miss out on more stories. Those of you who call yourselves New Zealanders may be familiar with this history, but I am ashamed to say that this is all new to me.

Hongi returned to his homeland via Australia. He managed to swap most of his gifts from the King for weapons and also collected the cache of 500 muskets, ordered for him by the French Baron.

BITING THE BULLET

In this way, he changed the nature of warfare on the North Island forever. A battle which might once have unfolded over weeks or months was now over in days. Tribal power balances were radically shifted and the Ngapui accumulated considerable territory, including the land on which the Europeans signed the Treaty of Waitangi. The period between 1810 and 1845 became known as the Musket Wars because of the way the introduction of guns perverted tribal conflicts, intensified battles and radically increased the number of people killed.

Hongi Hika himself was shot in January 1827. It is said that he invited people to gather round and listen to the wind whistling through the hole in his chest. He survived for many months but died from infection.

Hongi's pragmatism in dealing with missionaries and other Europeans never changed. Hongi could see the terrible cost that the guns he once coveted had wrought. He knew the Musket Wars had to end. On his deathbed, it is said that he encouraged his people to welcome white people and trade with them; be kind to them and live with them as one people. But, he said, if you see red-coated white men who do not do any work and only carry weapons, then know that they are dangerous people whose only occupation is war.

I don't want to know the colour of the coat worn by the Christchurch terrorist. What I do know is that he was one of the men Hongi warned his people about — someone who did not work but travelled the globe, cobbling together his sick white supremacist lies, stockpiling weapons for use against peaceful worshippers and children.

At the National Gallery, the orator tells the students that he plans to go to England and hold in his hands the ceremonial cloak that Hongi presented to King George. He says that his



CATHERINE VANDERMARK.

tribe, the Ngapui, is venerated and loathed in equal measure, but that he plans to invite other Maori leaders to join him, in an act of reconciliation.

My sister's phone buzzes again and this time we really must leave.

When I am finally home, an hour out of Canberra, I turn on the news. It's all about the New Zealand Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern. There is introductory footage of her meeting the English Queen in April 2018. She is wearing a korowai, a ceremonial cloak, just as Hongi Hiki once did. And then, in contemporary footage, dressed in black now, we see her announce a ban on military style semi-automatic weapons.

Less than a month later New Zealand's parliament voted on the ban: 119-1.



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