

**Archaeological Assessment of the SS Ventnor Ship Wreck
Hokianga Harbour mouth
NZAA Site No: 005/350**

April 2014

Written by Bill Edwards, Area Manager and Brooke Jamieson, Regional Archaeologist,
Northland Office of Heritage New Zealand in support of an Archaeological Declaration
Nomination

Executive Summary:

It is proposed to declare the shipwreck SS Ventnor an archaeological site under s9 of the *Historic Places Act* 1993 due to its national significance and potential risk from fossickers.

The SS Ventnor sank in 1902 approximately 15 km south west of the mouth of the Hokianga Harbour carrying a cargo of 499 coffins belonging to deceased Chinese gold miners. The 3,961-ton twin-screw steamer ship had been chartered by the Chong Shin Tong Society and other Chinese interests to carry the remains of Chinese who had died in New Zealand for reburial in their homeland. Besides these, she also carried 5,357 tons of Westport coal. On 26 October 1902, after completing her loading, the SS Ventnor sailed from Wellington bound for Hong Kong.¹

On the 27 October she struck a submerged rock off Cape Egmont and was holed forward. The engines were reversed and the ship managed to get free. As there were no suitable dock facilities at Wellington, the master decided to proceed to Auckland via North Cape for repairs. In the meantime the pumps were brought into use, but these could not cope with the water. By 9 p.m. on 28 October, when Ventnor was about 15km off Omapere, Hokianga Harbour, she became unmanageable and it was apparent that she would soon founder. Although all boats were launched, 13 lives were lost when the captain's boat was sucked under with the ship. The Ventnor's unusual cargo was not recovered.²

The wreck site of the SS Ventnor has now effectively become a maritime graveyard and memorial for the remains of the 499 Chinese gold miners and the 13 people who lost their lives when the ship went down in 1902.

Introduction:

This archaeological assessment was completed to accompany an archaeological declaration nomination under section 9 (2) of the *Historic Places Act* 1993. The report was jointly written by Bill Edwards, Area Manager and Brooke Jamieson, Regional Archaeologist of the Northland Area Office, Heritage New Zealand.

Section 9 of the Historic Places Act (1993) allows for a post-1900 site to be declared as an archaeological site:

Sections 10 to 20 of this Act shall also apply to any site that is not referred to in paragraph (a) of the definition of the term archaeological site in section 2 of this Act but is declared by the Trust on reasonable grounds, by notice in the Gazette and by public notice, to be a site that is or may

¹ <http://www.wrecksite.eu/wreck.aspx?138648>

² <http://www.wrecksite.eu/wreck.aspx?138648> and Papers Past Evening Post Volume LXIV, Issue 104, 29 October 1902

be able, through investigation by archaeological methods, to provide significant evidence relating to the historical and cultural heritage of New Zealand.

Notification as an archaeological site in the *New Zealand Gazette* then affords that site protection under the archaeological provisions of the Act. The New Zealand Historic Places Trust has previously declared six 20th century sites; the Napier Prison Wall, the Makatote Tramway, the Upper Nevis Conservation Area Gold Mining Complex, the 20th century components of Clark's and Holland's Pottery Brickworks at Limeburners Bay site, the Featherston Military Training Camp and the Norwegian Whaler's Base on Stewart Island.

These places were all declared as an archaeological site due to their national significance which was illustrated by a combination of unique or rare tangible heritage remains and important historic events or history. In addition, these sites all had the potential to be modified, damaged or destroyed by activities such as building development, fossicking or mining.

In the case of the shipwreck of the SS Ventnor, this nationally and internationally significant heritage site may be at risk of damage from attempts to fossick or salvage marine heritage items from the site which is also a maritime graveyard and memorial for the remains of the 499 Chinese gold miners and the 13 people who lost their lives when the ship went down in 1902.

Methodology:

This archaeological assessment was completed based on limited desk top research including brief over views of currently available digital literature, telephone conversations with local authorities and an individual and organisation associated with the Chinese remains associated with the Ventnor. A site survey was not undertaken as the site is located c. 15 km off the coast of the Hokianga Harbour in approximately 150m of water (35 38 155" S, 173 15 589" E).

This historic heritage assessment has therefore been compiled to provide evidence in support of the proposal to declare as an archaeological site the wreck of the SS Ventnor which sank in 1902 carrying the remains of 499 Chinese miners to be returned and reinterred in China.

In regards to the scope of this assessment, given the urgency of the situation there have been time constraints in undertaking the research. Whilst the research is considered sufficient for the purposes of assisting with declaration, further archival research may reveal additional information. A site visit by a marine archaeologist would also provide additional information.

Physical Setting:

The site of the shipwreck of the SS Ventnor is located approximately 15km south west of the opening to the Hokianga Harbour within at least 150m of water. Heritage New Zealand has been supplied with the map reference of 35 38 155" S, 173 15 589" E by a professional diver who has visited the wreck site. The location of the wreck means it is currently under the jurisdiction of Maritime New Zealand. Based upon its location, financial constraints and required technical diving skills a site visit was not undertaken.

It was not until recent years that amateur diving technology could extend to such dive-able depths as those in which the SS Ventnor is located. Based on phone conversations with those that have dived on the wreck, it has gone down bow first and fast, and the bow is badly crumpled. There is a large amount of wreckage on the sea bed and it has a number of fishing nets attached to it. A large scatter of coal surrounds the wreck site. Based on the historic information it appears that no cargo was recovered from the ship once it had sunk although a number of the remains of the Chinese were washed up on shore and buried by tangata whenua.



Figure 2: Showing the general location of the SS Ventnor shipwreck site (Google Earth 2014)

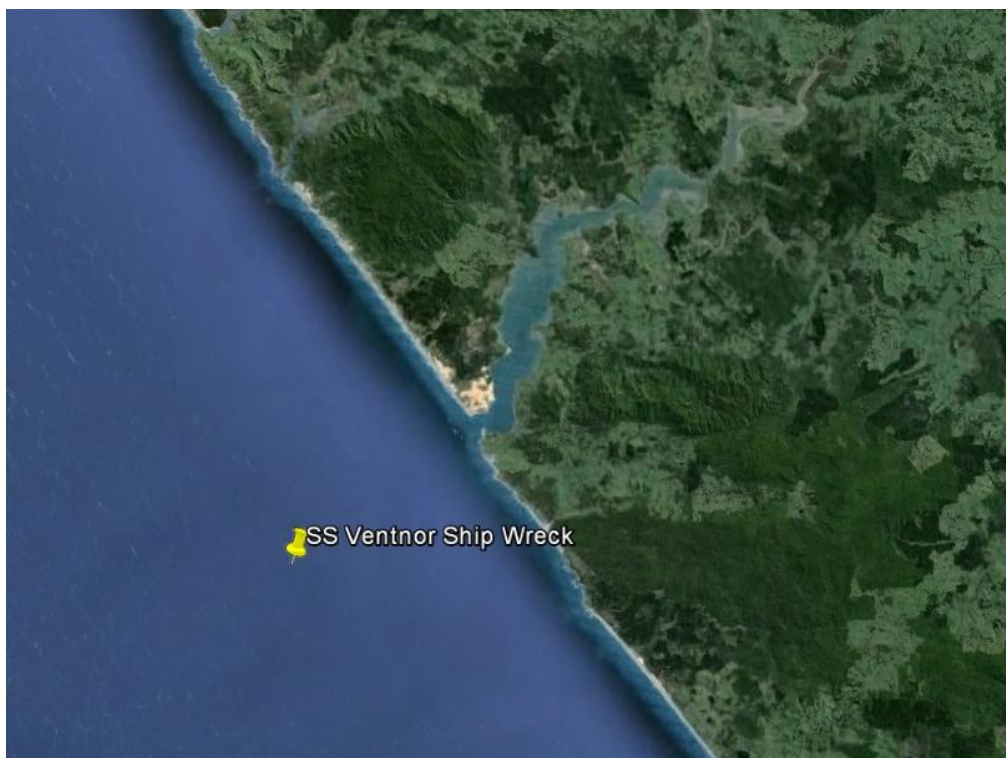


Figure 3: Showing the specific location of the SS Ventnor shipwreck site in relation to the mouth of the Hokianga harbour (Google Earth 2014)

Historical Background:

On the 29th October 1902, the Evening Post reported on the sinking of the SS Ventnor which sank off the coast of Hokianga carrying on board a cargo of 499 Chinese coffins bound for Hong Kong.³

The S.S. Ventnor was originally built by a Glaswegian firm Russell & Co, Port Glasgow at yard number 469 in 1901. She was classed as a twin-screw steam / triple expansion cargo vessel, with a maximum speed of 10 knots and measured 3961 grt (tonnage), 344.7 feet in length by 49.8 feet in breadth.⁴ The Ventnor was owned by Messrs. Gow Harrison & Co Glasgow and was launched on the 23rd January 1901.



Figure 4: Photograph of the SS Ventnor taken from the www.kairawhanau.com website, 23 April 2014

In October 1902 the Chong Shin Tong Society and other Chinese interests chartered the SS Ventnor to carry 499 coffins, containing the remains of Chinese gold miners who had died in New Zealand, for reburial in their homeland. Besides these, she also carried 5,357 tons of Westport coal, 144 sacks and 22 bales of fungus, 1 bale of tow and 1 bale of flax.⁵ Of interest was that 489 out of the 499 coffins were insured with Alliance Company for £5490.00, the fungus insured for about £320 and the coal at £4500.00.⁶

On 26 October 1902, after completing her loading, the Ventnor sailed from Wellington bound for Hong Kong. Weather conditions were fine and the sea smooth at the time of her departure. Shortly after noon on the 27th she struck a submerged rock off Cape Egmont but managed to get free. As there were no suitable dock facilities at Wellington, the master decided to proceed to Auckland via North Cape for repairs.⁷ This suggests that the Ventnor was making for the Waitemata Harbour (east coast) in Auckland rather than the Manukau Harbour (west coast).

By 9 p.m. on the night of the 28th October, about 10 miles off the coast near Omapere, Hokianga Harbour she sank. Although all 4 boats were launched, 13 lives were lost when the captain's boat was

³ <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&d=EP19021029.2.22>

⁴ <http://www.clydesite.co.uk/clydebuilt/viewship.asp?id=17815>

⁵ <http://www.wrecksite.eu/wreck.aspx?138648>

⁶ <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&d=EP19021029.2.22>

⁷ <http://ssventnor.wordpress.com/hokianga-journey-2013>

sucked under with the ship. Included within the group of 13 were the ship's captain and nine elderly Chinese attendants who had been given free passage home by the Cheong Sing Tong in exchange for looking after the coffins.⁸



Figure 5: Photograph of the Ventnor's lifeboats on the beach at Omapere where the Copthorne Hotel sits today. Photo taken by Mary Bryers. Photograph taken from the www.kairawhanau.com website, 23 April 2014

A magisterial inquiry was held in Auckland on 19th November 1902 which found that the sinking

*was due to either negligence or incompetence, but that, whether or not this was due to drunkenness, had not been proved by the evidence...It was also found that no blame was attributed to the master for determining to proceed to Auckland instead of returning to Wellington: and, further that the captain did all – that could be done for the safety of the crew and the vessel in the circumstances. The responsibility for the vessel striking rested with the captain alone.*⁹

The Captain was a man named H. Ferry who had been employed by Messrs. Gow Harrison & Co for the previous 17 years and this had been his first trip to New Zealand.¹⁰

No material or human remains were salvaged from the wreck.

The remains on board were those of Chinese goldminers. In New Zealand, the Otago goldfields attracted the first batch of organised Chinese migrant workers. They were recruited by the Dunedin Chamber of Commerce when European miners left Otago for the newly discovered West Coast goldfields. There were particular reasons for choosing Chinese people: they were thought to be hardworking, inoffensive, willing to rework abandoned claims and they preferred to return eventually to their homeland. In 1866, the first 12 men arrived from Victoria, Australia. By late 1869 over 2,000 Chinese men had come to the land they would call the 'New Gold Mountain'.

⁸ <http://ssventnor.wordpress.com/hokianga-journey-2013>

⁹ <http://trove.nla.gov.au/np/del/article/24848423>.

¹⁰ <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&d=EP19021029.2.22>

Early immigrants came from the Pearl River delta area in Guangdong province. Most (67%) were from Panyu County and the rest were from Siyi, Zengcheng, Dongguan and Zhongshan. These counties are located around the city of Canton (Guangzhou). Although most men were married, their wives remained at home to look after the men's parents. Chinese women seldom migrated to New Zealand and the gender ratio of the community was extremely unbalanced.

The plight of the Chinese miners was dire. Few struck it rich, and most remained in enforced bachelorhood, poverty-stricken and stranded in a strange land.¹¹ Some Chinese associated with the gold rush did become prominent, wealthy and respected business men in Dunedin, such as Choie Sew Hoy and his descendants. However, the population was mainly sojourners whose twin aims were to find gold and return back to China rich, or save enough money to have their mortal remains returned back to their ancestral soil.

The Cantonese custom of secondary burial, the idea of exhuming the dead, cleaning the bones, and then burying them again, helps to explain why so many Chinese were not only willing to exhume their dead but also to clean the bones and put them in containers for shipment back to China.

This was not the first occasion that exhumed Chinese remains had been sent from New Zealand back to China. In the 1880s a similar shipment had been made, though on a much smaller scale than that of 1902 organised for the Panyu people by the Dunedin Sew Hoy family.¹² In 1883, 286 Chinese from the South Island were repatriated on the ship Hoi How. In 1902 the second and last transportation of Chinese individuals was undertaken with the remains of 499 Chinese men aboard the SS Ventnor. This time Panyu men from both the South Island and the North Island were included, as well as eleven Wellington men from the Jung Seng county of China.¹³

Historical accounts vary on the exact description of the deceased Chinese and the numbers that came from around New Zealand. One documented report states that the exhumed remains of 265 men were loaded on board the Ventnor in Dunedin, 173 in Greymouth, 26 from other ports and 10 from Wellington. In total the remains of the 499 individuals had been disinterred from 40 cemeteries. The disinterment began in late 1901 and continued until 1902.¹⁴

Jo Belworthy notes that of the remains of the 499 individuals, most were in coffin boxes with 2 full-sized coffins, one of which contained Choie Sew Hoy.¹⁵ The majority of the coffin boxes were made from kauri and were either zinc or lead lined. The coffin belonging to Choie Sew Hoy is reported to have been made in rimu.¹⁶

Choie Sew Hoy was the man who organised for the Ventnor in 1902 to return the bodies of his countrymen back to their homeland. Unfortunately Choie Sew Hoy died before the ship could depart, so his body became part of the precious cargo. It was his son Kum Poy Sew Hoy who took over his late father's business and completed the transportation of the bodies.¹⁷

¹¹ <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/search/teara?keys=chinese+miners>

¹² <http://www.wrecksite.eu/wreck.aspx?138648>

¹³ <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/search/teara?keys=chinese+miners>

¹⁴ <http://ssventnor.wordpress.com/hokianga-journey-2013>

¹⁵ Belworthy, 2009

¹⁶ <http://www.kamirawhanau.com/?p=1069>

¹⁷ <http://www.kamirawhanau.com/?p=373#>.



Figure 6: Photograph of Choie Sew Hoy (c. 1895) taken from the www.kairawhanau.com website, 23 April 2014

James Ng writes:

Charles Sew Hoy was known to Chinese as Choie Sew Hoy, Choie being his clan name. He signed himself Sew Hoy in English, and this became his English surname. He was born probably between 1836 and 1838. His father, Choie Bing Some, was a farmer of Sha Kong (She Gang) village, north of Canton (Guangzhou) in the upper district of Panyu county, Guangdong province, China; his mother's name is not known.

*Sew Hoy went with other Cantonese gold-seekers to California, then to Victoria, and on to Otago, New Zealand, in about 1868 – two years after the arrival of the first Chinese mining parties. He opened a store in Dunedin in 1869 and developed into a successful merchant importing Chinese goods. Like other Chinese merchants in the city he became a social focus for the Chinese miners: providing advice, help and credit; outfitting and provisioning newcomers; and supplying Chinese stores in the goldfields. Sew Hoy was also twice reported to be exporting Jew's ear fungus (*Auricularia polytricha*) to China, despite his distance from the North Island forests where it grew.¹⁸*

This accounts for the “144 sacks and 22 bales of fungus” listed amongst the insured goods on board the *Ventnor* when she sank.

Ng goes on to say:

Unlike most of his fellow Chinese, who saw themselves only as sojourners, Sew Hoy was naturalised in 1873. He did not, however, bring his wife to New Zealand, although a few Chinese wives began arriving in Dunedin from 1873. Virtually nothing is known of her except that her name was Young Soy May, and that her two sons, Kum Yok and Kum Poy, came to New Zealand. There was at least one other child, a daughter, who remained in China. At some point Sew Hoy and Eliza Ann (sometimes known as Eliza Lilly) Prescott began living together in a modest villa in

¹⁸ Ng, J. 2012

Dunedin and had two children: Violet and Henry. It was presumably as a result of Eliza's influence that the children attended Anglican schools, since Sew Hoy probably never became a Christian. Eliza died on 15 February 1909, aged 40.¹⁹

Sew Hoy became a prominent leader of Otago's Chinese miners, most of whom also came from the upper Panyu district; as one man put it: 'If Sew Hoy tell you a stone roll uphill, you believe him.' He commanded respect from Chinese and European alike, not least because he opposed opium smoking, and because his word was his bond. To Europeans he was well known for his 'interest in public affairs.... As everyone knows, his name invariably figured on subscription lists'. Being bilingual, he was able to mix in European society, and joined St John Kilwinning Lodge of the Freemasons. By the early 1880s he was the best-known Chinese in Dunedin.

Sew Hoy's reputation spread, particularly because of his gold mining investments. He had 11 known mining interests, most notably in gold dredging. In 1887 he acquired 140 acres at Big Beach, a gold-bearing flat of about 250 acres on the Shotover River. Its surface ground had been worked over but Chinese miners had told Sew Hoy of the potential of its waterlogged deeper layers. In 1888 he decided to dredge Big Beach, although gold dredging was in its infancy and dredge design was still being pioneered. Previous dredging attempts had only limited success because the machinery used was faulty in design.

Sew Hoy formed the Shotover Big Beach Gold Mining Company in 1888. He held 146 of the 300 shares; Kum Yok was another shareholder, and the remainder were Europeans. After watching the Dunedin harbour dredge at work Sew Hoy ordered one of a similar type. In 1889 the 'Sew Hoy dredge' was working successfully on ground even 'quite away from the river'; it was designed for working the river flat as well as the bed. Its remarkable returns – as much as £40 for one day's dredging – created a 'dredging fever' which resulted in Otago's first gold-dredging boom from 1889 to 1891. Sew Hoy was regarded as the chief figure of the Shotover company, which not only opened up river flats to dredging but also firmly established dredging as a commercially feasible and profitable branch of gold mining.

The company was reorganised in 1889 as the Sew Hoy Big Beach Gold Mining Company. It built three more dredges and was the principal New Zealand gold-dredging company until 1897. It chose voluntary liquidation in 1897 after Big Beach was worked out. By this time, however, numerous companies were following Sew Hoy's lead, especially after the Electric Gold Dredging Company struck sensational returns on the Kawarau River. Dredging in fact led Otago's mining (and provincial) revival and ultimately won about one-third of its total gold production. The Sew Hoy dredge became the direct prototype of the New Zealand gold dredge, which itself became the leading gold-dredging design in the world.

From 1894, however, Sew Hoy and Kum Poy were concentrating on extensive hydraulic sluicing and elevating at Paddy's Alley, Nokomai, in north-west Southland. Here too they were perceptive and innovative and used a workforce of both Chinese and Europeans. Nokomai had been almost deserted when they arrived, but by 1895 news of Sew Hoy's initiatives led to a rush of new mining applications, 'dazzling' promises and a sustained mining revival in northern Southland. By 1898 Sew Hoy and his son had spent £15,000 and needed another £6,000. Consequently, in 1898 they floated the Nokomai Hydraulic Sluicing Company with themselves as the major shareholders; for many years the company was the top registered sluicing concern in New Zealand.²⁰

¹⁹ Ng, J. 2012

²⁰ Ng, J. 2012.

Sew Hoy proved decisively that nineteenth century New Zealand Chinese had the capacity and ability to undertake advanced mining projects, and could successfully enter the European world. Yet he did not abandon his Chinese traditions. The Cheong Shing Tong – the benevolent society of Panyu and Hua migrants which operated from his store – helped the poor and elderly. In 1883 the society was responsible for exhuming 230 Chinese dead and conveying them to Guangdong. Sew Hoy died on 22 July 1901 at Dunedin, where he was buried. His body was disinterred in 1902 during another mass exhumation and placed on board the Ventnor, bound for China. Unfortunately the ship sank off Hokianga, and his remains, along with most of the other 498 bodies, were lost. It is still remembered, however, that he wished to be buried in the Cheong Shing Tong's cemetery in upper Panyu, with the bodies of otherwise friendless former associates buried around him.²¹

After the sinking of the SS Ventnor, korero of the Te Roroa and Te Rawawa people tell of coffins and bones being washed up along the coast on their beaches. At the time tangata whenua did not know of the sinking or why the coffins were being washed ashore but they were treated with respect and were reburied using horses to drag the lead caskets up to be buried.

Te Roroa elders confirmed their ancestors had gathered the bones and buried them. Many were laid to rest in the vicinity of Kawerua, on the edge of Waipoua Forest. Te Rarawa further north, also had similar stories.²² A Maori elder, Alex Nathan remembers that Raiha Paniora had asked him, before she died, to look after the Chinese that are buried there.²³

The association between Te Roroa and Te Rawawa with those koiwi was ongoing from 1902. They also began developing relationships with the New Zealand Chinese community.

In 2009 Wong Liu Shueng, Kirsten Wong and Nigel Murphy sent out a report of interest to many New Zealand Chinese. While making a short film on the Ventnor sinking, Liu Shueng met a person who told her that they knew where some Chinese remains had been buried by local Maori. The site was a Maori burial ground and now on land cared for by the Department of Conservation.

Representative from the Sew Hoy family Duncan Sew Hoy, Poon Fah Association representatives (almost all the remains on the SS Ventnor were Poon Yu people), representatives from the Otago-Southland branch of the New Zealand Chinese Association, and the project team, were to meet with the locals, Te Rarawa Runanga and Te Roroa representatives.²⁴

²¹ Ng, J. 2012

²² der Graft, P. 2014

²³ Pers comm. Manos Nathan 2 May 2014

²⁴ <http://www.kamirawhanau.com/?p=1069>



Figure 7: Powhiri for Manuhiri at the Te Roroa Visitors Centre. (Photo courtesy of Manos Nathan)

This ongoing relationship culminated in a ceremony in April 2013, 111 years after the sinking, when descendants of those pioneering miners along with local iwi, were finally able to carry out the rituals needed to satisfy the hungry ghosts of their ancestors.

... 100 descendants of those long-lost Chinese miners - mostly from Auckland, but with a few from as far away as Hong Kong and Australia - travelled to Te Roroa's headquarters in the Waipoua Forest to unveil a plaque amid a freshly planted kauri grove.

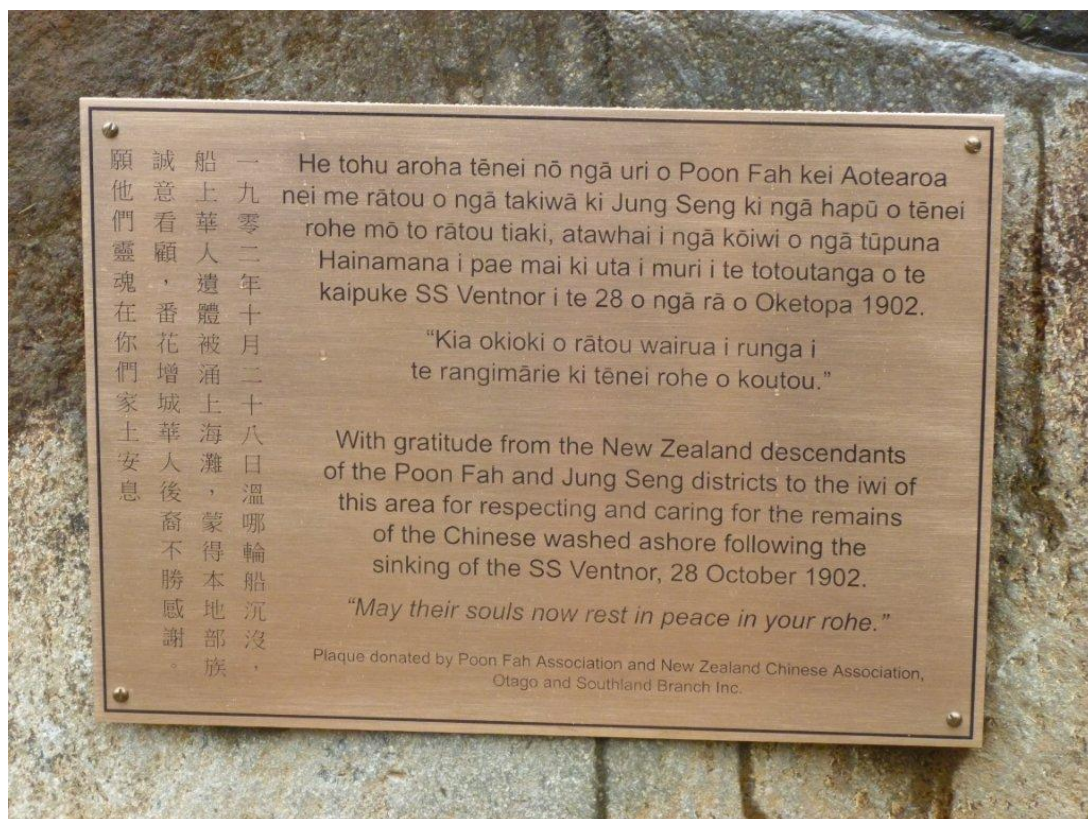


Figure 8: Plaque unveiled in Waipoua Forest. (Photo courtesy of Manos Nathan)

They then travelled to Kawerua, the site of a once bustling coastal settlement, for the first of many bei jey ceremonies. The ritual honours the dead when the exact location of their remains is unknown and involves calling the ancestors, lighting joss sticks and sharing food, usually chicken and pork.

On Friday the group made the long journey to Mitimiti, North Hokianga, where a century ago bones were gathered up and buried on Maunga Hione.

They were formally welcomed to Matihetihe Marae and dedicated another plaque, this one giving thanks to the people of Te Rarawa. It is mounted on what Ms Wong describes as a "spellbindingly beautiful" Chinese gate overlooking the sea.²⁵



Figure 9: Site visit to Kawerua where in 1902 koiwi were found on the beach and re buried by Te Roroa. (Photo courtesy of Manos Nathan)

It was a very important time for the thirty-nine descendants of Choie Sew Hoy, an Otago businessman whose remains sank with the Ventnor. His great-great-grandson Peter Sew Hoy commented that:

To be the first descendants since the boat went down 111 years ago to be able to pay our respects and do the Ching Ming ceremony, at the site where Choie Sew Hoy is, was very, very emotional.²⁶

²⁵ der Graft, P. 2014

²⁶ der Graft, P. 2014



Figure 10: Descendants of Choie Sew Hoy after the unveiling of the plaque at the Waipoua Forest. (Photo courtesy of Manos Nathan)

After being thanked by the Chinese community, kaumatua Alex Nathan commented that

Our people were just obligated to take care of the bones until such time as the rightful descendants appeared on the scene. They didn't do it with a view to being thanked. It was an obligation, we'd do it for anyone.²⁷

Previous Archaeological Work:

No archaeological investigations of the SS Ventnor have been undertaken.

The Heritage New Zealand Northern Region Area Manager Bill Edwards has been verbally advised by a person who has dived on the ship that the Ventnor appeared to have sunk very rapidly with the bow of the ship having gone straight into the sandy sea bed. Debris surrounds the wreck including a scattering of coal. Due to its location off the Northland coast the wreck has become entangled with stray fishing nets which now cover the site and are caught in the ship's structure.

Shipwreck sites, because of their physical nature are vulnerable to being looted for artefacts they may contain or material that maybe salvageable. A shipwreck is a special kind of archaeological site as it is a time capsule representing the particular moment in history when the event occurred.

Archaeological Values Assessment Criteria:

The archaeological values and significance of the potential archaeological features and deposits have been assessed using the following criteria:

1. Condition:

How complete is the site? Has the site suffered any modification or damage? If so, to what extent and how much survives?

²⁷ der Graft, P. 2014

Details surrounding the condition of the site are unknown but it is expected to be in good condition. The site of the SS Ventnor has lain undisturbed for the last 112 years with historical records indicating that the cargo was never salvaged. It is only within recent years that amateur diving technology allowed people to dive to this depth.

The wreck is an excellent example of the technology of the time with no additional modifications. It represents the particular moment in history when the event occurred.

2. Rarity/Uniqueness:

The extent to which the site reflects important or representative aspects of New Zealand history?

The association of the place with events, persons, or ideas of importance in New Zealand history?

How common is this site type at a local, regional or national level? Does it display any unique features, associations or artefacts?

The wreck of the SS Ventnor is absolutely unique and represents a period of history that is significant in the development of New Zealand as a country. From their first arrival in the goldfields of Otago the Chinese community was, and continues to be, an integral part of the New Zealand culture and economy.

The descendants of those whose remains were lost on the SS Ventnor have a strong association with the site, as do local tangata whenua who reinterred the remains as they came ashore and continue to care for the cemetery where they are buried.

3. Contextual Value:

The extent to which the place forms part of a wider historical and cultural landscape? How does this site function at both a local and landscape level? Does this site exist in isolation or form part of an archaeological landscape? How does this site compare to the sites of the same type?

This site is completely unique in a New Zealand archaeological context.

This shipwreck has many significant contextual values and layers. On the most basic level it is the site of an early 20th century maritime tragedy. On other levels it is a Chinese burial ground for Chinese men who worked in the Otago gold fields and shaped part of New Zealand history, economic, political and culture heritage during the 19th century. It is closely associated to a cemetery on shore where some of the remains that were washed ashore were reburied.

4. Knowledge Value:

The potential of the place to provide knowledge of New Zealand history that can be recovered through archaeological scientific methods? The technical value that is able to be revealed through archaeological scientific methods?

There is considerable information available relating to the ship and its manufacture, cargo and preservation. There are oral histories from descendants of those whose remains were lost and from tangata whenua.

In addition a maritime archaeological investigation of the wreck itself could contribute significantly to the understanding of the event.

5. Amenity and Education Value:

What amenity value does this site have? Can telling the story of this site provide for a better

understanding of heritage that will contribute the local, regional or national understanding of the place?

The potential of the place for public education.

The educational value of protecting this site is that it is a very important part of the history of the Chinese community in New Zealand which could be told in numerous ways, including if appropriate video footage of the wreck.

The site of the wreck is inaccessible to most people, with the exception of the diving community. The Chinese community regard this site as having huge significance and cultural value as a burial ground.

6. Cultural Associations:

Does this site have any cultural associations for group in New Zealand? The community association with, or public esteem for, the place? The symbolic or commemorative value of the place?

This site has significant cultural and spiritual values to the Chinese community within both New Zealand and China as a memorial and final resting place of 499 of their countrymen. Chinese culture considered that the remains of the deceased should be returned home so that proper burial could occur.

Within the Chinese culture, veneration of family ancestors is important. Family members should provide sufficient respect to the dead, and they in turn would exercise a benevolent influence over their descendant's lives and prosperity of their family.²⁸ The dead are considered to be in a better position to watch over their descendants if they are buried close to their native place of birth. It also gives their family members better access to pay their respects. This is known as the traditional rite of *bai jai* – paying respect to the ancestors. This is done to ensure the spirits are happy in the spirit world and that they will continue to look after their descendants in the world of the living.²⁹

The site is also significant to tangata whenua who buried the washed up coffins and remains within their own urupa and have become kaitiaki of the Chinese remains.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

The ship wreck site of the SS Ventnor is effectively a Chinese cemetery and burial ground. Given its location 15km south west of the Hokianga Harbour it can be considered remote and thus vulnerable to divers fossicking and salvaging material from the ship. There is significant potential for damage and destruction of this archaeological site if divers fossick or salvage material from the site

The removal of material from the site of the ship will modify, damage or destroy the site as a whole and can also be considered desecration of a burial site.

The shipwreck site of the SS Ventnor is a significant historic heritage place both in terms of a maritime disaster but also as the final resting place of the deceased Chinese gold miners who were on their final voyage home for traditional burial. The site is also significant in terms of New Zealand history in relation to the involvement of the Chinese gold miners who worked in New Zealand during the 19th and early 20th century and their role in the economic and cultural development of New Zealand.

Heritage New Zealand recommends that this site be declared an archaeological site as per s9 of the *Historic Places Act* 1993 to afford it the same protection as pre-1900 archaeological sites due to its significant heritage values.

²⁸ http://www.cultus.hk/cemetery_lecture/Wilson.pdf

²⁹ <http://www.kamirawhanau.com/?p=1069>

Acknowledgements:

Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga would like to thank Manos Nathan for permission to use his photos and for assistance with the development of this report.

Bibliography:

Belworthy, J. 2009. Northland discovery closes chapter in New Zealand's gold mining history in Campbell Live, TV3.

URL: <http://www.3news.co.nz/TVShows/CampbellLive/Northland-discovery-closes-chapter-in-New-Zealands-gold-mining-history/tabid/817/articleID/111590/cat/84/Default.aspx>

Der Graft, P. 2014. Peace at last for Northlands 'hungry ghosts' in *Northern Advocate*.

URL: http://www.nzherald.co.nz/northern-advocate/news/article.cfm?c_id=1503450&objectid=11096325

Kamira Whanau

URL: <http://www.kamirawhanau.com/?p=373#> accessed on 17 April 2014.

URL: <http://www.kamirawhanau.com/?p=1069> accessed on 23 April 2014.

Nathan, Manos Pers. 2014 Comm. to Pam Bain, Heritage New Zealand, 2 May 2014.

Ng, James. 'Sew Hoy, Charles', from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 30-Oct-2012

URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/2s14/sew-hoy-charles>

Papers Past

URL: [Papers Past Evening Post Volume LXIV, Issue 104, 29 October 1902, Page 5](#) accessed on 17 April 2014.

The Wreck of the SS Ventnor. The entry was posted in Uncategorized on 22/09/2010 by kirstenwong

URL: <http://ssventnor.wordpress.com/hokianga-journey-2013/> accessed on 17 April 2014.

Wilson, BD. nd. *Chinese Burial Customs in Hong Kong*

URL: http://www.cultus.hk/cemetery_lecture/Wilson.pdf accessed on 17 April 2014.

Wong, H & Bill Willmott. History of Chinese People in New Zealand from Te Ara website

URL: <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/search/teara?keys=chinese+miners> as accessed on the 17 April 2014

Further information:

<http://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/ventnor>

<http://www.3news.co.nz/TVShows/CampbellLive/Northland-discovery-closes-chapter-in-New-Zealands-gold-mining-history/tabid/817/articleID/111590/cat/84/Default.aspx>