

Since 2014 the nation has commemorated numerous centenaries in remembrance of the Great War. Brett Graham's major sculptural installation at Two Rooms in Auckland is a monument to another 'Great War' event.

In the last months of World War I Princess Te Puea Herangi established a temporary camp on Vauxhall Road at Narrow Neck, Devonport. Her presence provided visible support to 111 Waikato Māori forcibly held in the military camp and recruit depot there. Conscripted to fight 'for King and Country', they had continually resisted enlistment. Acts of passive resistance continued within the camp, including their determined refusal to dress in military uniform. For this they were physically punished, fed bread and water, paraded in front of other conscripts and volunteers, deprived of blankets and made to sleep on bare wooden bunks. Some were transferred to Mount Eden gaol and sentenced to hard labour. During their movements within the camp at Narrow Neck, they could see Te Puea holding vigil on the roadside.

*Monument* is a memorial to Te Puea and her adherence to the pacifist decree issued by her grandfather, Tāwhiao, the second Māori king. Tāwhiao led his people against invasion by the Crown during the violent phase of British colonisation in New Zealand. In 1863 British imperial troops crossed the Mangatāwhiri stream near Mercer to conquer the fertile lands held by Waikato Māori. After a series of battles Tāwhiao retreated with his people to the area known as the King Country, living as a refugee for two decades. He returned to public view in 1881, seeking peace and restitution, and issued the following injunction outlawing further warfare by his people:

*I shall bury my patu in the earth and it shall not rise again ... Waikato, lie down.*

When Māori were asked to volunteer for service in World War I, Te Puea maintained this position. As the war progressed more soldiers were required and pressure was put on the Western Māori parliamentary electorate, which encompassed Maniapoto, Taranaki and Waikato Māori – the people most affected by military invasion and land confiscation in the nineteenth century – to provide their share 'for King and Country'. Their opposition was clearly and repeatedly made. Yet in 1918 conscription laws were amended to specifically target Waikato and Maniapoto in a strategic assault on the authority of the Kīngitanga by the government of the day. Te Puea then offered refuge to conscripts at her pā, Te Paina, on the shore of the Mangatāwhiri stream.

On 11 June 1918 police arrived at Te Paina and arrested the young males, the first being Te Rauangaanga, the sixteen-year-old son of King Te Rata and nephew of Te Puea. In making this arrest the police disregarded the minimum conscription age of eighteen. The conscripts offered no resistance. They were transported by train to Auckland and detained at Narrow Neck. These events are commemorated in the song, 'Ngā Rā o Hune', still widely sung today.

*In the days of June / conflict arose in Waikato / Te Rauangaanga was taken / with his band of men / as they stood in defiance / of the enemy.*

While detained the conscripts were placed under continued pressure to participate in training. For this reason Te Puea's vigil was a source of reassurance. So, too, were the teachings of Tāwhiao, who foresaw that those who remained steadfast in their principles would be exonerated by history. Eventually, however, all but fourteen men donned military uniform. But on the day of their departure to the Western Front, the war came to an end.

Although Graham's *Monument* is a memorial to Te Puea, it takes the form of a block fort, a defensive structure used to protect settler property. The stoutness of the

sculpture, constructed from recycled pine, stained with 'Black White' white paint and studded with gun embrasures, heaves against the interior space of the gallery. As a memorial the sculpture also mimics the follies built by colonists after the New Zealand Wars. These structures offered little by way of defence, operating largely as symbols to mark the colonists' claim to land while also engaging with the British tradition of erecting monuments to the defeated.

Like Te Puea's vigil at Narrow Neck, this is a temporary monument. Its location presents a paradox: it may seem better sited at Te Paina or Narrow Neck. These sites would allow the monument to tell one story, as given above. In Auckland city, however, *Monument* speaks a different history to the inheritors of colonial wealth.

Around the walls of the gallery range a series of eight wood engravings, indicating the eight lines of 'Ngā Rā o Hune.' Traced on sheets of laser-engraved macrocarpa are the boundary lines of the great nineteenth-century Auckland land estates. Inscribed on those shapes are the names of Māori dispossessed from those lands, drawn from a 1900 petition titled 'Landless Maoris in the Waikato, Thames Valley and Tauranga Districts'. Through these works Graham creates a direct relationship between the migrant British owners of these estates – unnamed in the art works – and the many Māori whose livelihoods were destroyed in the establishment of the modern nation-state of New Zealand.

Here, however, those pillars of colonial society in Auckland are named and their deeds introduced: the sculpture now operating as an 'anti-monument' specific to Josiah Clifton Firth. Firth arrived to New Zealand in 1854 and was part of an elite group of Auckland businessmen who established key mercantile infrastructure in the country. The group was led by Thomas Russell, who migrated as a child in 1840, and the then attorney-general, Frederick Whitaker; like them, Firth entered national politics albeit briefly. They (and others) became known as 'the war party' and agitated for British military deployment against Māori to acquire lands at a greater pace than was possible through legal sale. Whitaker and Russell held senior government positions in 1863 when the Waikato was invaded; Whitaker as premier and Russell minister of defence. Firth served in the House of Representatives as the member for West Auckland and joined the Auckland naval volunteers tasked with destroying Māori pā, crops and transport.

After the battles in Waikato, these men built massive land estates. They purchased undeveloped rural allotments from soldiers who served in the New Zealand Wars and took advantage of Māori during this tumultuous period. Firth had long desired a large block of land in Matamata, which he leased and eventually purchased from Ngāti Hauā. As regional infrastructure was developed, speculators divided the lands into smaller blocks, which were sold for large profit. In their roles as politicians, lawmakers and entrepreneurs, the 'war party' deliberately engineered war against 'rebel' Māori, their conduct revealing the blurred ethical boundaries between public service and personal enterprise at this time.

These colonial warmongers spent some of their fortunes erecting monuments throughout the landscape of conquest – testaments to themselves and their defeated foes. At his Matamata estate Firth created a 16-metre-high reinforced concrete folly in the shape of a block fort, now the Firth Tower Museum containing exhibits by the Matamata Historical Society. Nearby is a memorial cairn to Wiremu Tāmihana, the Ngāti Hauā leader who established the Kīngitanga and from whom Firth acquired the Matamata block. The cairn is marked with Tāmihana's words attesting to Firth's good character and right to occupy this land. However, Firth's example and that of the 'war party' undermines their moral argument for war as a necessary process for establishing a model egalitarian society of industrious settlers.

*Monument* also points to the recurrence of profiteering from crisis situations. Today property investment has created a housing crisis – a situation that replicates, in part, the experience of Waikato Māori in the later nineteenth century. Where the dispossession of Waikato Māori was calculated and indiscriminate, today a wide stratum of citizens is landless, and many homeless. New waves of migration, foreign investment and land speculation leave little hope of homeownership as a viable goal. Equally, shifts in global power have changed New Zealand's position in the world, which is reflected in different trade and migration routes from the west to the east. This leads to the intriguing question: who needs the protection of this structure today? What class of citizen might we find huddled inside, their guns perched against its embrasures? Who, in the current climate, has the most to protect? By asking these questions in these precarious times, *Monument* represents a threat, with the viewer in the line of fire.

– Anna Marie White



