



## Te Papa research into the early collection and trade of Toi moko

When the first Europeans arrived in New Zealand they sought to collect as much about the 'native people' and the place as possible. Curiosities were amongst the most desirable items to be collected, and included the weapons, pendants, tools, clothing, carvings and even those items thought morbid and 'savage' which represented both the Māori people themselves and ceremonial and spiritual aspects of Māori life. That was in 1769, and almost 100 years later in the 1860s the last record of this type of curiosity was produced. That so-called curiosity was of course the Toi moko (also known as mokomōkai and ūpoko tuhi) or preserved/dried tattooed Māori head. Over a period of 15 to 20 years this trade was extensive and well established in both the Bay of Islands and Kapiti, though the trade began in Queen Charlotte Sound in 1770.

The evidence for the exceedingly high demand for this so-called curiosity can, or rather could, be seen in museums and medical institutions around the world, most frequently in England, but also in North America.

Prior to trade, Toi moko were made for one of two reasons; either to preserve the head of a loved one or family member, which was "venerated, cherished, and wept over" or as a trophy of war to be "reviled and ridiculed" and sometimes "presented as special gifts of victory". In the case of the latter, this enhanced the mana of the victors and at the same time as decreasing the mana of those they defeated. It has been recorded that in times of peace they would "restore them to the party from whom they had taken them; an interchange of heads being a common article in their treaties of reconciliation."

The collection of Toi moko in New Zealand began with Captain James Cook's first voyage on board the *Endeavour*. On 20th January 1770 Joseph Banks, while anchored at Queen Charlotte Sound, traded a pair of old white linen drawers for the preserved head of a boy, aged about 14 or 15 years old. The trade is said to have taken place as a consequence of Bank's request for proof that Māori consumed the flesh of their enemies. According to accounts by Banks and Cook, a few days after the request a man returned to the ship with at least 4 Māori heads that had been preserved.

During the voyage of the *Resolution* in November 1773 also at Queen Charlotte Sound, Lieutenant Richard Pickersgill obtained an unpreserved head in exchange for a single nail.

Though the first records regarding the trade in Toi moko identify Te Waipounamu or the South Island as the place where the first trade occurred, it was at the opposite end of New Zealand, at the Bay of Islands, that the extensive trade of heads for muskets and vice versa took place from the early 1800s. Kapiti, like the Bay of Islands, was also engaged heavily in the trade from the latter half of the 1820s. Other places from which heads were traded or obtained in New Zealand include Thames, Foveaux Strait, Otago, and Murihiku.

The trade was short-lived and soon after 1830 it appeared that the trade was dying out. In 1831 Governor Darling, in Sydney New South Wales (which was an important

stop over for ships heading to New Zealand), imposed a ban in the British colony and a fine of £40, on the trade in Toi moko in Sydney by ships' Captains and crew. The proclamation banning the trade was followed by an Act of Parliament. The ban came as a result of at least 14 Toi moko being traded to the ship Prince of Denmark while in Thames. This was made known to the Australian Governor by the missionary Samuel Marsden, however, Toi moko still left New Zealand regardless of the ban, as Māori and their respective iwi (tribal groups) were independent and living autonomously.

Among those who obtained these much sort after curiosities, were the captains of the many colonial trading schooners, whalers, French and US expeditions and local settlers who were commissioned to purchase them for the overseas market, as well as missionaries such as Samuel Marsden, who purchased at least two "heads", for a gentleman at the University of Oxford, prior to the ban.