

BATTLE OF PUKEHINAHINA – SPEECH 29th APRIL 2019

Mihi and thanks, and acknowledgements

Since we're in a church I'm going to start my address with a whole string of confessions. Please bare with me as I bare my soul.

The first time I heard of the Battle of Gate Pa was in 2013, when I got onto council. I had previously lived in Tauranga for 23 years and I had absolutely no idea of this city's history, nor the slightest interest. I remember telling my friends that Tauranga doesn't need a museum because just look at the growth – we are such an attractive place to live. I had not once visited The Elms or bothered to find out the incredible stories around our Tauranga Moana.

I had no idea there were three local iwi and I had never heard of the term raupatu. I thought Te Papa only referenced our national museum, rather than being the peninsula we are now currently residing in.

Father forgive me, for I have sinned.

Sadly, back then I believe I represented the majority of our city residents. I'm sure if I asked 100 random people down the street most could not name our three local iwi, most couldn't recall the key elements of the Battles of Pukehinahina or Te Ranga, most couldn't tell the story of General Cameron's officers holy communion and supper with Rev Brown at The Elms on 28th April 1864, most would have no idea that this Te Papa peninsula is often referred to as Naboth's vineyard.

And herein lies one of Tauranga's major weaknesses – the ignorance and apathy towards our rich culture and heritage, which leads to a kind of 'soul-less-ness' and battle for

identity. We struggle to present a city which has more attractions and interest than our beautiful harbour and coastline. We are no longer a sleepy retirement village, but neither are we a bustling metropolis with world-class amenities. We have relied on the Port of Tauranga, and residential construction to shape our identity, along with the recent complaint that due to our significant traffic congestion and housing unaffordability Tauranga is now a mini-Auckland - perish the thought!

Fortunately for our city there have been hard-working folk who have refused to let our stories go untold, and have significantly added momentum to the recognition and value of our rich cultural history. Just to mention a few, there are members of Te Kohinga who have been a representative voice for the Christian church seeking to bring reconciliation between pakeha and Maori. There is the Battle of Gate Pa Trust whose efforts included the very popular Battle of Gate Pa exhibition, and culminated in the 150th anniversary commemoration right on this spot in 2014. The leadership of this church, St George's continues to reinvigorate this historically significant site through events such as this one today. There are local historians and authors including Alistair Reese, Buddy Mikaere, Cliff Simons whose research and writings have provided evidence-based accounts of our early history. It is these people to whom we must all give due honour, for they are making it impossible for even the most apathetic of Taurangians to neglect our history.

So how do I see this iconic battle, and the surrounding historical narrative, play out in 21st century Tauranga?

In politics, like most arenas in life, there are often two extreme views, neither of which produce good fruit.

At one end of the spectrum are the people who believe that post-settlement Maori are now at a distinct advantage, their political voice is already too strong, and they have a huge say in how city development happens thanks to their elevated status through the Resource Management Act. They are worried that every new street and reserve will be given an unpronounceable Maori name. A classic example is of course the ex-Phoenix Carpark, with its new name Te Papa o Nga Manu Porotakataka Park. They would balk at parts of Greerton or Merivale being renamed Tutara Wananga. They are concerned that council will hand over land and assets to local iwi and hapu at significantly below market value.

At the other extreme are those who believe that Maori will always require nanny-state to look after them, and that redress for past grievances will never be fully realised. Maori deserve to be holding our central and local government to ransom, and their voice should speak more loudly than pakeha, because they are tangata whenua. Some remind us pakeha that they will always hold mana whenua over this land. That being the case, I might be living in, and contributing to this city for over 50 years but somehow my status as a resident is somewhat diminished.

Proponents of both of these extremes will forever be dissatisfied and the festering wounds of racial disharmony will remain unhealed.

My preference is to carefully tread a middle ground so that the majority of our community can buy into future initiatives, and Maori and pakeha can value and respect each other. A lasting reconciliation through consensus is absolutely possible given goodwill on both sides.

Let me cover a few examples, starting with the vexed topic of a museum for Tauranga.

You'll be pleased to know that I have overcome my historical ignorance and am now absolutely committed to a museum, but it must be a modern interactive place where our precious taonga can be displayed and revered, and our stories told with pride. It should also point us towards a prosperous future where all Tauranga residents are treated with equal respect. At the risk of darkening the mood in the room I believe that in all likelihood this is not achievable on Cliff Road. There are just too many hurdles to overcome, including RMA, neighbour concerns, insufficient room for traffic, geotech challenges. The museum is likely to be a moderately priced option on council owned land in the central city. However, the better news is that I am a proponent for some form of cultural centre, wharenui and marae-atea on Cliff Road, where council would effectively gift the land, and local iwi and hapu would build and operate the centre. The amazing stories of the Otamataha Pa – the good, the bad and the ugly – will forever be memorialised on this most significant site. In the same vein I would support a similar approach to the land right across the road here. Imagine if we could uncover and proudly display some of the actual trenches or redoubts associated with this battle. These initiatives would finally give both residents and tourists alike the opportunity to learn about, and embrace, our city roots. Then you would see Tauranga's heart and soul really begin to stir, and our identity as a city be built on a stronger foundation.

Another vexed issue is tangata whenua's desire to have Right of First Refusal on any council land which is surplus to requirements. After several very productive hui between

councillors and members of the Tangata Whenua Collective I believe we are at the point where council can and should finalise our policy. I say beware of anyone who would seek to delay this decision until after October's election. That could mean that tangata whenua would again be thwarted and have to start all over again with a potentially substantially new group of councillors! I have always said we have little to fear but much to gain by pursuing a closer relationship with tangata whenua.

Let's talk about 11 Mission Street. The current resolution on our books is that TCC will gift the land to the Otamataha Trust who will in turn provide a long-term peppercorn lease to the Elms Foundation. This is subject to community consultation. Whilst I voted for this to occur I have been thinking lately that this will only achieve a small slice of what the Otamataha Trust is really seeking in their ideal world. As a result I believe it is a greater priority to seek a more sophisticated and permanent solution which would cover the entire site of The Elms. This will take significant, open and frank discussions between all interested parties. I would happily facilitate these hui (particularly if I was fortunate enough to become Mayor in October). I'm a great believer in getting everyone around the table, thrashing out all the issues, and coming up with several options to progress to a positive conclusion.

There are so many other aspects of our city's future that I could provide commentary on but I don't want to bore you. Please feel free to have a chat to me after this service.

Finally, let me move into a higher realm. I'm convinced that there are spiritual forces, both righteous and evil, over Tauranga Moana. We, through our words and actions either empower Te Atua God's army, or the Enemy's forces. We

have made great strides over recent years towards reconciliation, most recently the Anglican Church apology to local hapu on 1st December last year. My prayer is that through honouring our history, including the Battle of Pukehinahina, and through maintaining an ongoing dialogue of respect and forthrightness, that the spiritual windows of heaven will be open over Tauranga Moana, and that everyone of our community will enjoy a prosperous future.

Tena koutou etc.