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**The Acquisition of the  
Partington Collection by  
Whanganui Regional  
Museum:  
Valuing relationships in museum  
policy & practice**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of requirements for the  
degree of Master of Arts in Museum Studies at  
Massey University, Palmerston North, Aotearoa**

**Rowan Amber Carroll**

**2008**

For my beautiful daughter b

## Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to underline the importance of developing useful and mutually beneficial relationships between local iwi and museums, and to consider the subsequent implications for museum practice.

The thesis assembles a variety of contemporary sources in order to document and construct a chronological narrative of events: minutes and communications; interviews with staff and key participants in the process of acquiring the Partington Collection by the Whanganui Regional Museum; media reports; and a survey of recent literature.

The Partington Collection of Whanganui Māori photographs is integral to this examination because of its importance to both Whanganui iwi and the Whanganui Regional Museum. The situation of colonial photography in museums has changed over the century from being viewed as a factual reflection of the cultural imperatives of indigenous peoples, to being viewed as a colonial construct consigning indigenous peoples to their past. Because this Collection is the most comprehensive photographic documentary of Whanganui Māori from the turn of last century it adds immense value to the Museum's existing collections. However to Whanganui iwi the photographs of their ancestors are taonga tuku iho: far more than just photographic images they are demonstrably and undeniably imbued with the mana of their tūpuna.

The public auction in 2001 of the Partington Collection created a catalyst for action and an opportunity for Whanganui iwi and the Museum to work together to ensure the return of the photographs to Whanganui, an outcome that was finally achieved in 2002.

The thesis concludes that the successful return of the Partington Collection to Whanganui could not have been possible without the long term evolving relationship between iwi and the Museum and in particular the more recent emergence of a bi-cameral governance structure.

Furthermore the maintenance of relationships and communication is crucial to the evolution of museum practice. This would suggest a reversal of the traditional perspective that museum practice and procedure is pre-eminent. Instead, this case study demonstrates that relationships are at the heart of museum practice.

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I would like to extend my deepest sympathy to Edith Bell who lost her husband John unexpectedly on 12 April 2008.

Permission to include the images was approved by the Whanganui Regional Museum's Tikanga Māori House and Joint Council<sup>1</sup> and it is with the greatest respect that I include them. The people in these images belong to the whānau, hapū and iwi of the Whanganui region.

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<sup>1</sup> Minutes , Joint Council, Whanganui Regional Museum 17 September 2004.

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**Abbreviations**

CH	Civic House
GWP	Governance Working Party
JC	Joint Council
TMH	Tikanga Māori House
UCOL	Universal College of Learning
WCF	Whanganui Community Foundation
WDC	Wanganui District Council
W. H. T.	William Henry Thomas (Partington)
WRM	Whanganui Regional Museum
WRMTB	Whanganui River Māori Trust Board