

Makereti

Nominated by Z. McGreevy, Senior Assistant Curator, Pitt Rivers Museum



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Makereti was descended from Ngati Wahio and Te Arawa, New Zealand Maori tribes of North Island. Raised by her grand uncle Maihi Te Kakuoparaoa and great aunt Marara Marotaua in Whakarewarewa, a thermal region on the the North Island, she spoke Maori until learning English at 10 years of age. Makereti became an internationally renowned Maori tour guide of Whakarewarewa, escorting the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York (later to become George V and Queen Mary) around the region during their Royal tour in 1901. Makereti proactively promoted her culture, publishing a *Guide to the hot lakes district* in 1905 and in from 1909 to 1911 organised, and escorted, Maori cultural performers on tours of Australia and Britain.

In 1912 Makereti returned to England to marry Richard Staples-Browne, a wealthy English landowner. Remaining proud of her cultural identity, she brought with her a personal collection of carvings, cloaks, ornaments and weapons; as well as an archive of photographs, manuscripts and newspaper cuttings related to her time as a guide and overseas tours. Makereti's son Te Aonui, from her first marriage to Frank Dennan, became a member of Queens College, Oxford University, in 1921 and registered for the Diploma in Anthropology.

The same year, Te Aonui joined the Oxford University Anthropological Society (OUAS) and during a meeting held at the Pitt Rivers Museum showed some examples of Maori mats and cloaks, presumably Makereti's, and described how they were made. Makereti presumably met a number of people connected with OUAS through her son and in 1922 Makereti was elected to become an Associate Member.

Makereti filed for divorce from her husband in 1923 but continued to live at Oddington Grange, in Islip, Oxfordshire. She invited anthropologists, students and interested visitors there to show them her personal collection of objects from Whakarewarewa and lecture on Maori history. Unfortunately, her son Te Aonui left the University with completing the Diploma in Anthropology. However, in January 1927 Makereti was admitted to the Society of Home Students (now St Anne's College) and registered for the Diploma in Anthropology. Makereti continued to be a member of OUAS and at a meeting in 1928 gave an illustrated lecture on 'The Maori as he was', which was attended by 142 members and visitors rather than the usual 20 or so. Around this time the University decided Makereti had clearly shown intellectual and analytical ability and should submit a dissertation for a graduate degree of Bachelor of Science rather than have to complete the Diploma course first. Tragically, on 16 April 1930 Makereti died suddenly of a ruptured aortic artery, just two weeks before her thesis was due for examination.

Makereti was good friends with Thomas Kenneth Penniman, who had also registered for the Diploma in Anthropology. Penniman had been helping during Makereti's recurrent illness, taking her notes home to type out for her to check and then re-write until satisfied she was satisfied with their accuracy. After her death Penniman remained editing the manuscript, consulting with Maori Arawa elders via her son Te Aonui, who had returned to New Zealand. Published in 1938 Makereti's thesis, *The Old-Time Maori*, is an important account and analysis of the customs of Te Arawa from the first-hand experience of a Maori person and written from the perspective of a woman; dealing with subjects like child-rearing, generally ignored or treated casually by male writers describing Maori society.

Makereti's contribution to anthropology remains outstanding as women have generally been overlooked in the history of the subject and anthropologists studying their own culture still remain in the minority.

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