

Maori spirits standing guard over grave sites

By Callan Lawrence

ITS history isn't immediately obvious but Rangihou Reserve in Parramatta has been claimed as a sacred Maori burial ground.

The spirits of a Maori community that lived on the site in the early 1800s still guard it, their ancestors believe, protecting the graves of four children.

The existence and location of the burial site was lost in history after their patron, Samuel Marsden, died in 1838.

Jennifer Holt-Alexander is a direct descendant of the sons of Maori chiefs buried in the reserve, she said.

"The deaths of the children were horrific," she said, "it was European diseases".

"Sixteen children went to school here and 13 of them died.

"Four of them remain here."

Ms Holt-Alexander said the children had been

sent by their fathers to Australia from the northern tribes of New Zealand to build a relationship with the NSW colony.

By 1819, 16 Maori boys were attending a seminary where Rangihou Reserve now sits by the Parramatta River.

Ms Holt-Alexander said Maori had not claimed the land as their property but as a site with scared significance.

Parramatta Council has commissioned archaeologists to find the remains. Ms Holt-Alexander said once that was completed a Maori burial ceremony "Tangi" could be performed.

"We're not here to do anything in particular other than bring the children up (from the ground), protect them and respect the site," Ms Holt-Alexander said.

"Then all the descendants will come from everywhere once they find out the children are up."

“The deaths of the children were horrific . . . it was European diseases. Sixteen children went to school here and 13 of them died.



Guardian: Ngaphui Tribe descendant Jennifer Holt-Alexander. Picture: Carlos Furtado



Chief meets Marsden

Historical facts:

- Maori chief Hongi Hika (pictured) visited Sydney in the 1814 and returned to New Zealand with Samuel Marsden later that year;
- After establishing a Christian mission in New Zealand, Marsden returned to Sydney;
- In 1815, Marsden built a seminary at Parramatta for the instruction of young Maori;
- In succeeding years New Zealand chiefs and sons of chiefs attended there;
- Taurea, son of chief Walatarau died at Rangihou, 1818
- Tenana, nephew of chief Hongi Hika, died at Rangihou, 1820;
- Perehiko, son of chief Perehiko died at Rangihou, 1822;
- Atu, son of chief To Koki died at Rangihou, 1822;