

**Tauranga Writers**  
**Sunday Focus Session 19<sup>th</sup> August 2018**

**Excerpts from Dr. Trevor Bentley's presentation 'On Writing History'**

**Jacky Marmon Learns the Ropes**

Learning a bewildering array of terms relating to the ship and the sealing trade, Marmon soon acquired the distinctive vernacular of the deep-sea mariner, a language completely unintelligible to 'land lubbers.' 'Learning the ropes' meant learning the name, location and purpose of each of the hundreds of lines and pieces of rigging used in every part of the ship's operation, which required considerable rote memorization. As sailors were generally illiterate and manuals therefore useless, the crew assisted their novice shipmate's understanding by teaching him a host of useful rhymes and shanties.

As an apprentice seaman, Jacky was initiated into the semi-mythical world of ghost ships, sea monsters, mermaids, cannibal isles, island paradises, freak storms water spouts and rogue whales. Below decks he listened in awe to tales of Timor Jack, the bull sperm whale that continued to smash every boat sent against him and New Zealand Tom, the humpback that destroyed nine whaleboats 'before breakfast' one day in 1804. Marmon inhabited a world where nautical beliefs and traditions went against reason and logic. Like his shipmates, he came to believe that the *Commerce* was a living thing, a person, always a 'she' with her own thoughts, feelings, moods and eccentricities. Treated well by the crew, she would keep them safe. If they neglected or slighted her, she would abandon them to the mercies of a pitiless ocean.

**Jacky Marmon Turns Mihenere (Missionary).**

One fine morning during the summer of 1835, the little bell atop the white painted Wesleyan chapel at Mangungu tolled out across the blue waters of the Hokianga River. Soon after, the districts more tardy self-professed Christian Maori began drifting downriver on waka, or straggling along the riverside paths from nearby pa and kainga. Bound for the last service of the morning, the extended families, attired in their finest native dress and with a pipe in every mouth, carried bibles translated into Maori. As the last of the parishioners filed into the cool, shadowed interior of the chapel, a small dugout shot out from the mangroves at Rawhia on the opposite shore, its single occupant paddling swiftly against the rush of the incoming tide.

The gathered flock had barely commenced the second hymn of the service when the chapel door opened. Rev. Stack, the officiating minister, stared aghast, the singing faded, but none in the Maori congregation dared turn to stare, for they sensed *his* presence. Beyond the hallowed doorway stood a figure, reviled by the brethren for his lawlessness, but admired by Maori for his intransigence. Of medium height, with a long distinctive face and dark hair flowing loose beneath a battered top hat, there *was* something sinister about the stranger's watchful stillness. A collective gasp accompanied his step across the threshold and then audibly tracked his footsteps to the end of the far right back pew where no Maori sat thereafter. By nightfall, the incident was a topic of discussion in every pa and kainga from Hokianga to the Bay of Islands. Hake Mamene, a noted Pakeha toa and eater of men, Te Mamene, famed tohunga Pakeha and conduit to the spirit world of Te Reinga had turned mihenere (missionary).