The theme of today's commemoration is 'Te Hereka Waka' – the mooring place for the many waka which have voyaged to these shores.

I want to consider, who has been in those waka, why they came, what they brought with them and what that combination offers Ōtepoti/Dunedin’s future.

People have been attracted here for over 1,000 years. But before I go back to the very first arrivals, I want to reference one particular episode which I believe set the tone for how Ōtepoti /Dunedin developed.

In 1848, well after first contact between mana whenua and pakeha in this area, two British sailing waka - the Philip Laing and the John Wickliffe – arrived with aspiring settlers from the Presbyterian Free Church, to set up a new settlement from scratch. It would eventually be named Dunedin.

What isn't so well known, is that those Scottish (and English) settlers were assisted and sustained over their first crucial year by the local Maori who helped them with housing and food when they had insufficient means of supporting themselves.

Some of the settlers' surviving diaries acknowledge that they might not have made it through without that manaakitanga.

So a welcoming spirit was evident here before it was even called Dunedin. I will return to this theme. Suffice to say, I believe while that spirit has undoubtedly waxed and waned it is still alive today.

Now let’s go back before that – starting with the first people who came here.

Waitaha, then Kāti Mamoe and Kāi Tahu settled here from about 1200 but by the time first European contact occurred in the early 1800s, the mana whenua here were an amalgam of those three tribes.

Those very first Europeans were sealers and whalers and they also intermarried with mana whenua.

What attracted those early people, and what attracted subsequent arrivals?

First – resources – both prolific kai/food supplies then raw materials like seal skins and whale oil, and later the agricultural potential of the hinterland. Economic opportunity.

Second, I guess, security: security of mooring for waka and later sailing ships, but also the hope of security against attack from enemies (that certainly motivated some of the Kāi Tahu and Kāti Mamoe migrations south).
And the other thing that attracted them was freedom – the freedom to practice religion the way they wanted, freedom from war and civil strife and the hope of freedom from poverty. Together they were the lifestyle offering of Ōtepoti/Dunedin.

So in 1848 there was already a mix of European and Maori blood lines. With the arrival of the Scottish – and what’s called the ‘Presbyterian invasion’ – it looked as if the young Dunedin would become a Scottish/Maori partnership.

However Dunedin’s cultural pattern was destined to be much more intricate than just those two threads.

And what brought that about was gold.

It attracted people from all over the globe.

The Chinese were some of Otago’s most prolific early immigrants – many of them arriving during the late 1860s gold rush. They all hailed from Guongdong Province of which the main city was Canton – now Guangzhou. Their descendants ran numerous market gardens but are now heavily represented in the professions.

The first Polish settlers came to Otago in 1872, when their homeland no longer existed as a nation. It had been ruthlessly divided by its powerful neighbours Germany and Russia 80 years earlier. Described ironically as ‘German’, an initial group of just over 100 Poles arrived on their ‘waka’ – the emigrant ship Palmerston in 1872 – as part of the New Zealand Government’s public works programme to develop the country’s infrastructure. They helped to build the new railway line across the Taieri.

The first of what became a vibrant Lebanese community in Dunedin arrived in the 1880s. Tight bonds of kinship and conviviality united the early Lebanese in the crowded alleyways of Walker (now Carroll) Street where they first settled. The Lebanese became a major business force in the city.

Starting in the late 1860s several groups of Maori prisoners from Taranaki – overwhelming innocent victims of the wars that followed unjust confiscations of land – were brought to Dunedin by the waka load.

Ngati Ruahine, Ngati Mutunga and Ngati Ruanui, including – particularly unjustly – the pacifist men from Parihaka. They were all set to work as slave labour, literally building the foundations of this city. They worked levelling the Octagon, built the foundations of the University Clock Tower, Maori Road through the Town Belt, the stone walls that stretch so far around our Harbour and much more.

Dunedin’s interaction with the Taranaki men illustrates again this city’s inherent manaakitanga.

A little context. New Zealand in the late 19th Century displayed considerable racism and discrimination. Agreements with Maori iwi over land deals were dishonoured and land was simply stolen. The Chinese, who in some cases had been invited into the country to rework the gold fields, because they were acknowledged as diligent, trouble-free citizens, were discriminated against and had to pay a poll tax of 100 pounds each. The Lebanese also encountered discriminatory citizenship rules and scorn about the trades they chose to follow.

But Dunedin provided some refreshing exceptions.

The Taranaki prisoners became extremely popular in the city and were treated with respect and sympathy. The four local MPs took up their case in Parliament, demanding that that they either be put on trial or released. They were eventually released. And prior to their departure, the local community gave some groups new suits and money and feted them around the town.
The local Chamber of Commerce took up the cause of Chinese workers demanding they be paid the same minimum wage as other workers.

In following years Dunedin’s cultural tartan became even more colourful, and the subsequent arrivals of Dutch, British, Germans, Pacifica peoples, Americans, Indians, Vietnamese, Lao and Cambodians, among many others, left no doubt that the Dunedin of the early 20th Century with its strong, regular rhythms of the Scottish diaspora, had melded into a much more complex weave where no one culture so clearly dominated.

The latest cultural strand to enrich our community has been the arrival of Syrian families, seeking refuge from one of the worst humanitarian crises of our time.

I am incredibly proud of the generosity, tolerance and warmth – the manaakitanga shown by our community in welcoming Syrian families. In uncertain political times internationally, Otepoti/Dunedin leads the way in welcoming, supporting and celebrating cultural diversity.

Now what did those cultural strands – each waka – bring to Ōtepoti/Dunedin that gave it the values our city has and that we can build on?

Well those values were expressed early in the kind of city that grew into Dunedin.

Early on Dunedin was very outward looking. Connections with far-off places were critical. Dunedin was assertively mercantile and conscious of the need to export to earn its way in the world.

Educational opportunity was hugely important as was the right of democratic self-determination – both in church and government. Dunedin was socially progressive with our citizens taking a lead on women’s suffrage and labour conditions.

The city has also always appreciated its special place in the natural environment. Going right back to the consciousness of mana whenua of the role of their Waitaha forebears like Rakahautu in carving the very shape of Te Wai Pounamu or as it was earlier known – Te Waka a Maui. This island was long seen as one big waka which all incoming peoples share. Each people contributed positively to Dunedin’s value package.

Now while those values made Dunedin the leading city in New Zealand, we have had lapses.

This community, indeed our country, hasn’t always honoured those values as it should. As I referenced earlier, Kai Tahu were impoverished by bad faith land deals. Chinese were discriminated against for decades.

However, I am proud of the steps Dunedin has taken, and our achievements in addressing those wrongs. Lan Yuan – Dunedin’s Chinese Garden is partly an acknowledgement of past wrongs. Memorials in each of our cemeteries mark the resting places of those Taranaki prisoners who never returned to their own whenua. Now the University of Otago has the highest retention and pass rate for Maori students of any university in New Zealand.

The warm connection between our mana whenua and our Scottish ancestors – expressed most plainly on the Dunedin City Council’s coat of arms – with the Maori warrior and Highlander on either side – is a basis for partnership between the original people of this place and ALL those later arrivals.

On many occasions, including the swearing in of the new Council and in welcoming overseas delegations and refugee families to our city, waiata and bagpipes will be heard together – the pibroch and the pounamu – the piupiu and the plaid. That’s us. That partnership represents all the other cultural strands in our community as well.

The collaboration between Council, Kai Tahu and community on Dunedin’s Environment Strategy, Te Ao Tūroa – is the latest example of partnership. The draft strategy was launched
here at Ōtākou Marae two years ago, to recognise the role of tangata whenua as kaitiaki of this place.

However we are all part of the Dunedin ecosystem and we all need a healthy, natural environment that provides food, shelter, water and clean air.

But as well as being the guardians of our environment, it is also our responsibility to ensure that we are the protectors and nurturers of the economic and social legacy and potential of Ōtepoti/Dunedin for all our tamariki – the next generation and the mokopuna that will follow.

That legacy is an amalgam of the values that all the various waka brought to these shores, and in partnership, it is what we offer to those in the various waka of the future who will undoubtedly join us.

He waka eke noa
A waka which we are all in without exception.

Na reira
Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa

Dave Cull
Mayor of Dunedin