

# The New Zealand Herald

## Huia adds touch of NZ to distant holy artwork

By [Edward Gay](#)

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A Kiwi minister has added a touch of Aotearoa to his icon of St Paul which greets worshippers at St Paul's Cathedral in London.

Regan O'Callaghan's image of the saint includes the now-extinct bird the huia adorning the saint's right shoulder and a koru pattern on his left.

The white tail feathers of the huia were worn by people of high rank in Maoridom on special occasions.

Mr O'Callaghan said they also carried a powerful conservation message.

"What we consider natural and beautiful needs to be considered as such and protected," he said.

"I wanted to say, here is something beautiful in nature and as well as enhancing life, it should remind us of the sacred."

The icon, commissioned by the Bishop of London, has been hung at the front of the high altar at St Paul's and Mr O'Callaghan has had the privilege of seeing people enjoy his artwork.

"I have also bumped into some New Zealanders – some recognise it, some don't. Some think it is a tui."

He said his mother was of Te Arawa iwi and two years ago he got the chance to look at some huia feathers belonging to his aunt.

The huia bird became extinct in the early part of last century. One of the reasons, according to *Te Ara Encyclopedia*, was the introduction by Europeans of predators such as cats, rats, stoats and weasels.

Another reason was the sudden popularity of the bird's feathers worldwide after the Duke of York, who was soon to be crowned King George V, visited New Zealand.

According to Te Papa's website, the Duke was given a huia feather during his 1905 visit and wore it in his hat. The price of huia feathers soared from £1 to £5.

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Regan O'Callaghan was commissioned to paint his unique image of St Paul for St Paul's Cathedral. Photo / Supplied

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