

THE GREAT WAR TIMES

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FROM THE WHANGANUI
WWI CENTENARY PROGRAMME



COMMEMORATING THE GREAT WAR

The First World War which lasted from 1914-1918 is still referred to as The Great War. It affected the lives of all New Zealanders at the time, from the families and friends who lost loved ones in battle or from sickness to those who spent years raising funds for patriotic causes as well as those who nursed and tended the wounded. For the many men who served in the war and returned home safely to New Zealand, it was an experience many of them wanted to forget. Indeed, returning soldiers seldom talked about the war and today their children and grandchildren are picking up the pieces and trying to find out exactly what did happen one hundred years ago and what effect the war had on their lives.

At the time war was declared in Europe on 4 August 1914, Wanganui was the fifth largest urban area in New Zealand. People from Wanganui and with connections to this area played an enormous part in the war, both by serving abroad and contributing at home. Country areas around Wanganui – including Waitotara, the Rangitikei and Waimarino – had a lot of men working on farms and clearing the bush when the war started. The large numbers of men listed on our country war memorials is testimony to the fact that so many enlisted from the place they were working at the time, even if their home was elsewhere. In 1919 it was reported that more than 1,000 ex-pupils of the Victoria Avenue School (and its predecessor, the District High School) had served in the war.¹ The DHS/Victoria Avenue School memorial plaque in the Wanganui Intermediate School hall lists 95 old boys as “The Unreturning Brave”. (See photograph on page 3.)

The Whanganui WWI Centenary Programme has been developed as a partnership between the Whanganui Regional Heritage Trust and the Wanganui RSA, Whanganui Regional Museum, Wanganui District Council, Wanganui District

Library and many other local institutions including Wanganui Collegiate School. We have contacts also with Rangitikei and Ruapehu people who are researching WWI stories and have met several times with members of the public to engage them in our activities, including those whose families served with the Pioneer Maori Battalion. As a result, the interest in World War One and our local stories is growing and we will use *The Great War Times* to share this information and also to provide details of activities happening over the next four years. Printed copies of *The Great War Times* will be available in local libraries, museums and other public places while copies can also be downloaded from our website www.whanganuiheritage.org.nz and other partner's websites.

Wendy Pettigrew, Chair, Whanganui Regional Heritage Trust



Photographs of his mates, battlefields, camp, hospital and shipboard life taken during the war by local man, Billy Connell, will feature in the Whanganui Regional Museum's exhibition to open in October 2014. WRM 1966.142.1 24A

¹ *Wanganui Chronicle* 8 April 1919 report of William Bruce, chair of the school committee, speaking at Victoria Avenue School entertainment.

RESEARCHING YOUR WORLD WAR ONE CONNECTIONS

For assistance with your research, go to the Alexander Heritage and Research Library in Queen's Park, Wanganui any week-day afternoon, 1-5pm. Don't forget to look at the Biographical Index cards at the Library if you are researching local people and families. Ask about other information concerning World War One that the Library holds which may help with your research. Check with other libraries in our region about the resources they have.

The first step in researching WWI connections is to consult the **New Zealand World War One Service Personnel and Reserves Index** at the Library. This CD published by the New Zealand Society of Genealogists includes lists of those who served in other forces (Australian, British) as well as nurses and other medical support staff and those on the reserves lists. You can search the index by surname and also by occupation, eg nurse. Take note of the person's service number as it will help identify the correct record on other indexes and catalogues.

New Zealand Expeditionary Force Service Records are at Archives New Zealand in Wellington. They are being digitised. Check out the online catalogue at www.archway.archives.govt.nz; you can download for free any files that have already been digitised (but you will need a broadband connection with the new file formats). If the file you want has not yet been digitised but is on the catalogue, you can e-mail Archives at Research.Archives@dia.govt.nz and ask to have it digitised. This will be done quite quickly so keep an eye on Archway for new additions. If you have looked at Archway in the past and not found the record you want, go back and have another look. More records are being added all the time, including those for men who served in WWII as well as WWI which were previously held by the Ministry for Defence. If you still can't find the record you want, look under different spellings for the surname or forename variations.

Auckland War Memorial Museum's Cenotaph Database includes information about many who served not just those who died during the war. The Museum is also keen to add to their database and you can submit information to them. Check out the database at www.muse.aucklandmuseum.com.

An important source of information for those who died in the war is the **Commonwealth War Graves Commission**. Check their website www.cwgc.org for details of the cemeteries as well as the battles in which a soldier lost his life.

Many New Zealanders served with other countries as men often enlisted where they happened to be living and working at the time. The WWI Service Personnel and Reserves Index will point you in the right direction for those who served with Australian or British forces.

Records for the **Australian Imperial Force (AIF)** are at the National Archives of Australia. They have been digitised and can be accessed freely. Check out their website www.naa.gov.au and go to War Service Records and do a Name Search, noting WWI as the category you are interested in. You just put in the surname and then a list comes up which you scroll down until you find the right entry. Choose to view the digitised record and it will come up quickly, page by page.

Records for **British army regiments** are a problem. Many of the service records were burnt in WWII, but some do remain. There are Medal Cards available on Ancestry (at the Library) and some War Office (WO339) records at The National Archives (TNA) at Kew in London. Check out the TNA catalogue at www.discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk and search by name. The WO339 files have not been digitised but can be obtained as digital files from TNA for a price. These files are not service records but include other papers relating to the soldier, eg medical board records, recruitment information. TNA are also digitising war diaries so check out their WWI portal on www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/first-world-war for more information about what is available.

Records for pilots in the **Royal Flying Corps (RFC)/ Royal Air Force** are more accessible. You can get pilot's photographs and index cards from their Royal Aero Club licence application on Ancestry (at the Library). TNA has digitised some service records (AIR76) which can be obtained for a small fee. Another series of files, AIR79 is being digitised. Some RFC pilots also have WO339 files.

British Naval records are also at TNA, in the ADM (Admiralty) series. These also include the pilots who served with the Royal Naval Air Service which merged with the RFC to form the RAF in April 1918.

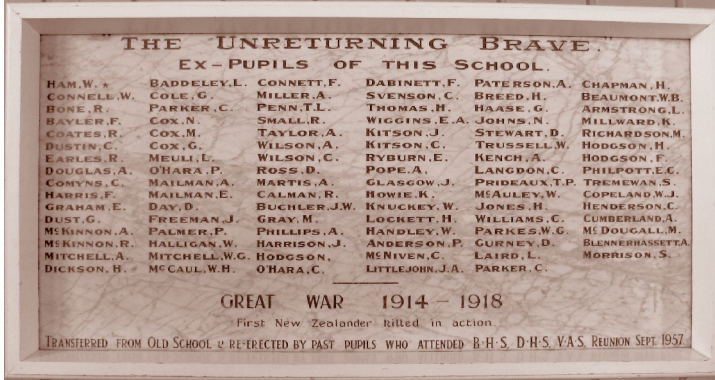
Don't forget that **local newspapers** are a vital source of information about WWI and people. The *Wanganui Chronicle* has been digitised up to 1919 on www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz with *The Freelance* having some useful snippets about Wanganui people from 1917-1920. *The Evening Post*, *Dominion* and Auckland papers are also digitised beyond 1920. Information about patriotic activities at home also feature in the papers at the time so your family may well be mentioned somewhere.

Finally, do use Google or other search engines to research people and places; remember to go back and check again as new information becomes available all the time.

OUR PEOPLE, OUR STORIES

The Great War Times will feature stories of people with links to the Wanganui area. We already have lots of information to share but will welcome stories about those who served in any capacity, including those who returned home safely, some of them to face an uncertain future.

The first New Zealand soldier to die in action



The District High School/Victoria Avenue School Memorial plaque now located in the Wanganui Intermediate School hall records W Ham as the first ex-pupil to die in the war.

Irish-born William Ham lived with his family in Wanganui during the first years of the 20th century, during which time he attended the District High School. The family had moved to Motueka by 1911 and he enlisted with the Canterbury Infantry Battalion on 15 August 1914, leaving with the Main Body of the Expeditionary Force on 16 October. Private Ham was involved in fighting the Turks on the Suez Canal early in 1915 and was wounded at Serapeum on 3 February, dying of his wounds three days later. James Allen, Minister of Defence, sent a telegram to his mother, Hester Ham, noting: "I sympathise with you most sincerely in your sad loss, and hope that you will find some consolation in the fact that he is the first upon the roll of honour of the New Zealanders to die in action for their King and country in upholding justice and right."¹

War Graves in New Zealand

While most New Zealanders who died in World War One are buried overseas, there are a number who died after they returned home and are buried here in graves that are maintained by the Ministry for Culture and Heritage. In Wanganui itself, there are five men buried at Heads Road Cemetery, 15 at Aramoho, two at Matarawa and one at Pakaraka Maori Cemetery. The deaths had to occur before 31 August 1921 which was deemed to be the official end of the war. Margaret Marks from the Ministry checks our war graves every two years, following a tradition started in

1915 by Edith Statham, the first person employed by the Department of Internal Affairs to identify New Zealand War Graves. Our local monumental masons, Anderson Memorials, have been involved in maintaining these graves and the headstones of the soldiers ever since 1915.

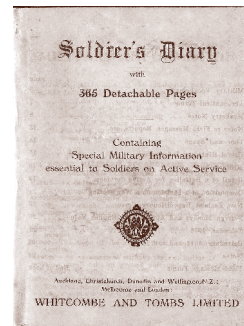


Margaret Marks with Clive Aim from Wanganui District Council on the recent inspection tour of war graves at Heads Road Cemetery.

Diaries and other memorabilia

Many people have precious records in their family archives that can now be made more accessible and help us to understand people's lives and actions in the war. Susanna Norris's grandmother, Annie Montgomerie, kept a diary while with her family in England during the war. *Annie's War*, to be published in November by Otago University Press, will give a unique insight into a woman's perspective of life at this time of conflict and her feelings while her two sons were in action.

Private Rae Fraser Scott from Kukuta saw action with the Wellington Mounted Rifles at Gallipoli and in the Middle East. He kept diaries throughout the war years; these had been sent to him by his aunt to encourage him to record what was happening. At the time, all letters home were censored.



Rae Scott recorded in his 1918 diary that on 9 February he "went into Cairo in afternoon; had photograph taken". Gabriel Lekegian was a celebrated Armenian photographer from Istanbul who set up his Cairo studio in 1887 near Shepherds' Hotel.²

Autograph albums were all the rage in Edwardian times. When he returned home on the *Westmoreland* in 1919, Lieut Paki Hoani Mete-Kingi got the signatures of many of the men on the boat, including the captain as well as fellow Pioneer Maori Battalion soldiers. Dardi Mete-Kingi Mato has kindly let us digitise this album, which her father purchased from a stationery shop in Rouen; we would welcome offers of help to index the names in the album so we can share this treasure with others. Mete-Kingi's two brothers, Henare and Teira Hoani, were both killed in the war and have a brass plaque in their memory at St Paul's Memorial Church in Putiki.

¹ *Nelson Evening Mail*, 8 Feb 1915; *Wanganui Chronicle*, 27 Mar 1915; Cenotaph Database, Auckland War Memorial Museum.

² "G. Lekegian & Co, Cairo" embossed on Scott's photograph currently in possession of his great-niece, Marion Donald.

NOTICEBOARD

News about other Whanganui WWI Centenary Programme projects

Remember me: Letters from our men at the Front

The Wanganui District Library has a collection of letters written during the Gallipoli and Western Front campaigns and sent home to Wanganui by officers in the 7th (Wellington-West Coast) Company of the Wellington Infantry Battalion. These have been digitised and transcribed and will be available on the Library website later this year. They provide a unique insight into life on the front line at the time and mention a number of Wanganui men.

Great War Roadshow

Rather like the “Antiques Roadshow”, the “Great War Roadshow” will travel around our region with portable scanning and digital photographic equipment so people can bring their precious family memorabilia in to be recorded at a venue close to home. The Whanganui Regional Heritage Trust is managing the Roadshow and will also have its equipment based at the Alexander Library in Queen’s Park from August 2014, open weekday afternoons 1-5pm.

Volunteers are needed to help with the Roadshow. Training in digitising will be provided by NZ Micrographics, the experts in heritage scanning and photography, at the Alexander Library in late July. If you would like to learn more about the Roadshow and how you can be involved, contact Wendy Pettigrew at the Heritage Trust email below.

For service rendered: Honours Boards and Memorials

Local photographer, Leigh Mitchell-Anyon, is to photograph indoor memorials in our area so we can record these lesser-known memories of the Great War. Honours boards often listed the names of all who served while memorials tend to record those who died in action. We already know of some really interesting boards: the honours board in the Cosmopolitan Club in Wanganui was dedicated by Prime Minister Massey in September 1919 just before he opened the Sarjeant Gallery; the board in St Paul’s Presbyterian church includes the names of six women who served as nurses or volunteers; Hunterville RSA has a flag embroidered with the names of local men who served; St John’s Church at Tutu Totara is dedicated to John Willoughby Hadfield Marshall with plaques for others who also died in the war.

You can help by letting us know of other boards and memorials – in churches, schools, clubs – so we can include them in one way or another in this project. We would also welcome help to index the names of those listed. Again, contact Wendy Pettigrew if you can help in any way.

Other WWI Centenary activities



ANZAC

Laurence Aberhart's new book of WWI memorials in New Zealand and Australia has been published by Victoria University Press, price \$60. This accompanies the exhibition of photographs at Dunedin

Public Art Gallery until the end of August.

The McNamara Photography Gallery in Wanganui will have a similar exhibition of Aberhart's photographs here in 2015.

Rangitikei Heritage

The group of museums in Bulls, Marton, Hunterville, Mangaweka and Taihape are busy preparing a DVD on WWI stories, linked to items in their local collections. This will be available for sale later this year; we will have details in our next issue of *The Great War Times*.

The Maori War Memorial, Pakaitore/Moutoa Gardens

Work to strengthen this WWI memorial, and reinstate the stature of Herewini Wakarua on top, is due to start this spring and should be completed by Anzac Day 2015.

Wanganui Collegiate School

The school museum has a wonderful collection of WWI related memorabilia. *The Collegian*, the school’s magazine, includes information and letters from Old Boys at the Front. For information relating to Old Boys and the war, contact the Museum at wcs_museum@xtra.co.nz.

Wanganui Repertory Theatre

A call has gone out for local authors to write plays or vignettes commemorating aspects of WWI. We will keep you updated on progress; the intention is to have performances linked to the 2015 Wanganui Literary Festival.

For information on all national activities commemorating the centenary of World War One, visit the official website ww100.govt.nz.