

THE GREAT WAR TIMES

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FROM THE WHANGANUI
WWI CENTENARY PROGRAMME



LEST WE FORGET

Why are there so many memorials for World War I? It was called the Great War, the War to End all Wars. The outpouring of grief afterwards could give an answer to that question. Most of those who served and died are buried overseas and often their last resting places are unknown. While 18,166 New Zealanders died in WWI, 5,972 lie in unknown graves. These graves and overseas memorials were a long way from New Zealand, and families wanted somewhere to go to remember their loved ones. The names of those who died are recorded on approximately 500 civic war memorials throughout New Zealand.

Memorials took many forms. Most are obelisks and some of these have soldier figures or symbolic figures at the top of the structure. Memorial gates and arches were often installed at schools, sports grounds and cemeteries. A few towers were constructed to commemorate the fallen, some of which contain a clock. Memorial plaques are found in halls and libraries around the country. Memorial bridges were also built such as The Bridge of Remembrance in Christchurch. Beautiful stained glass windows were placed in churches and schools, such as the WWI memorial windows in Whanganui Collegiate Chapel, dedicated in Easter 1919. Some churches were purpose-built as memorials to those who served in WWI.

WWI memorials in the Whanganui District exist as monuments such as the Cenotaph in Queens Park and obelisks in Pātea, Waverley, Maxwell, Bulls, Turakina, Taihape, Hunterville and Marton. There is a Māori War Memorial at Pākaitore (Moutua Gardens). Memorial gates such as those in Raetihi, Mangaweka, Ōhākune and Taihape commemorate those from these places who died. The Queens Park School War Memorial Gate in Whanganui honours ex-pupils who gave their lives in WWI.

Larger memorials include the Memorial Tower on Durie Hill and the Cricket Pavilion at Whanganui Collegiate School. Two churches in the district built as WWI

memorials are Westmere Presbyterian Memorial Church and the Church of St John, Tutu Tōtara, near Marton. St Margarets Church in Taihape has a memorial altar.

There are also several memorials of a different style in the district, including a New Zealand Rifle Brigade Memorial seat on the corner of Great North Road and Virginia Road. Near Bulls is a memorial to Bess, one of only four warhorses to return home, of the more than 10,000 sent overseas from New Zealand.

A memorial flag embroidered with names of those who served and those who died hangs in the Hunterville RSA rooms. Brothers Melville, Lindsay and Alan Bull served at Gallipoli where Melville was killed. Their older sister, Gwendolen, embroidered a New Zealand Red Ensign with the names of all Hunterville men who had served overseas. It flew from a flagpole at the reception given for Brigadier General Meldrum on his return to Hunterville in 1919, probably at the Peace Day celebrations. A handwritten Roll of Honour hangs in St Johns Anglican Church, Matarawa.

Behind the Sarjeant Gallery are five memorial oak trees planted to commemorate those who served. The Mayoress, Mrs C Mackay, and the wife of the Member of Parliament for Wanganui, Mrs W A Veitch, planted them on 22 July 1919.

Memorial Honours Boards can be found in numerous halls and churches throughout the Whanganui-Rangitikei region.

Whanganui photographer Leigh Mitchell-Anyon was commissioned to develop a digital photographic record of regional WWI memorials and honours boards, located indoors and not always accessible to the public. Some of these photographs are reproduced in this issue and the complete set of the photographs are held in the Pettigrew Room in the Alexander Library.

Statistics published in *Fighting for Empire: New Zealand and the Great War of 1914–1918* (2014) by Dr Christopher Pugsley

WORLD WAR I MEMORIAL CHURCHES IN WHANGANUI

One of the more unusual memorials to those killed in World War I, but perhaps the most spiritually and emotionally comforting for the relatives, is that of the memorial church. We have seven in New Zealand. Two are in the Whanganui district, one in Whanganui and one in Marton.

Westmere Presbyterian Memorial Church was built in 1924, “to the glory of God and in loving memory of the men of the parish who fell in the Great War”. Inside the church are two WWI memorial boards, one listing those who served and returned and the other listing those who “fell in battle”. It is interesting that those listed are grouped according to their local district: Brunswick, Nukumaru and Maxwell, Kai-iwi, Rapanui, Westmere. Thirty men went from the Westmere parish and twenty four returned, making the death toll 20%, a significant number from a sparsely populated district. Descendants of J M A Cooper, D B Ross and C R Dobson still live in the area.

In 2015 the church was closed, and services held in the hall while the church was refurbished and earthquake-strengthened. As part of this refurbishment, and as a WWI centennial project, Greg Hall, a local glass artist, was commissioned to create a memorial window. The window is in triptych style in the most powerful primary colours. It has a real wow factor. The centrepiece is based on the Old Testament burning bush motif, which in New Zealand (and in other countries) is the symbol of



Westmere Presbyterian Memorial Church window
Photographer: David Bennett

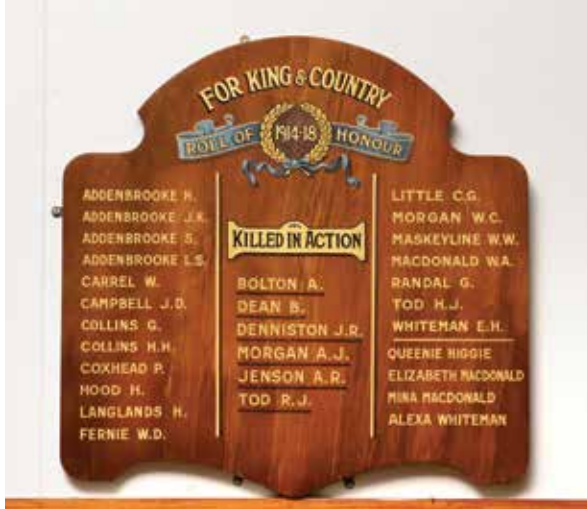
the Presbyterian Church. The bush burns and is never consumed; the presence of God amongst us is never extinguished. The bush in the window, however, is not an Arabian bush. This one has red blossoms, suggesting a pohutukawa tree and a New Zealand setting. The tree stands on a green hill, with the sea in the background, referencing the Westmere farming area from which these men came. In the foreground are red poppies to remember all the fallen, and on the hillside are nine, white crosses for the graves of nine local men (both wars) buried “in some foreign field”. At the bottom of the window is listed the names of the men who died. The whole is a most moving and striking memorial.

St John the Evangelist Memorial Chapel, now known as St Johns Church, Tutu Tōtara, in the parish of Rangitikei, was also built in 1924. There had been a wooden church on the Tutu Tōtara site since 1884, but in 1924 it was rebuilt in more permanent material by Mrs J W Marshall, wife of Major John Williams Marshall, who lived at Tutu Tōtara and whose father-in-law had given the land on which the original chapel was built. This new place of worship, designed by Frederick de Jersey Clere, was built in memory of John Willoughby Hadfield Marshall, son of Major and Mrs J W Marshall, killed at Lagnicourt, France, on 21 March 1918. The church was consecrated by Bishop Sprott on 22 March 1924. Inside the church are two WWI memorial plaques to the memory of Marshall family members. John Willoughby Hadfield Marshall’s plaque outlines his four years of service on the Somme, culminating at Lagnicourt. The other remembers Arthur Richard Fitzherbert, who married Lucy Marshall. He enlisted at the grand age of 62, not in Marton, where everyone knew his age, but in Canterbury where he passed for 40! He was the oldest enlisted soldier in WWI. He was killed in Gaza in 1917.



In memory of J W H Marshall, St Johns Church, Tutu Tōtara
Photographer: Leigh Mitchell-Anyon

**A SELECTION FROM THE PROJECT
BY LEIGH MITCHELL-ANYON,
WHO PHOTOGRAPHED WORLD WAR I
MEMORIALS AND HONOURS BOARDS IN THE
WIDER WHANGANUI REGION.**



Mangamahu Hall



Memorial flag, Hunterville RSA



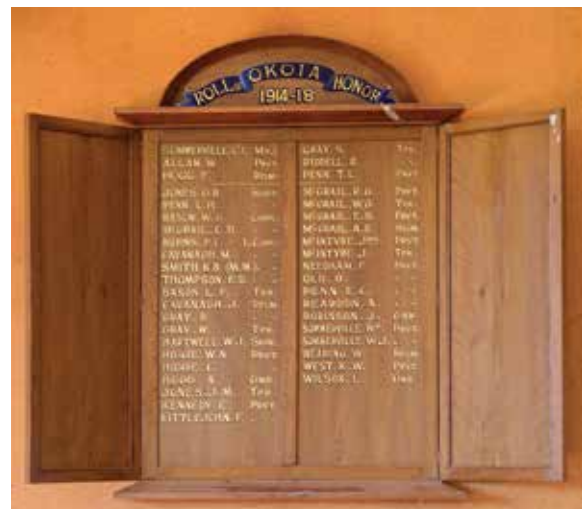
St Johns Church, Tutu Tōtara



Memorial flag detail, Hunterville RSA, L&M Bull top right
A cross beside a name denotes a man who died in battle or of wounds



St Johns Church, Matarawa



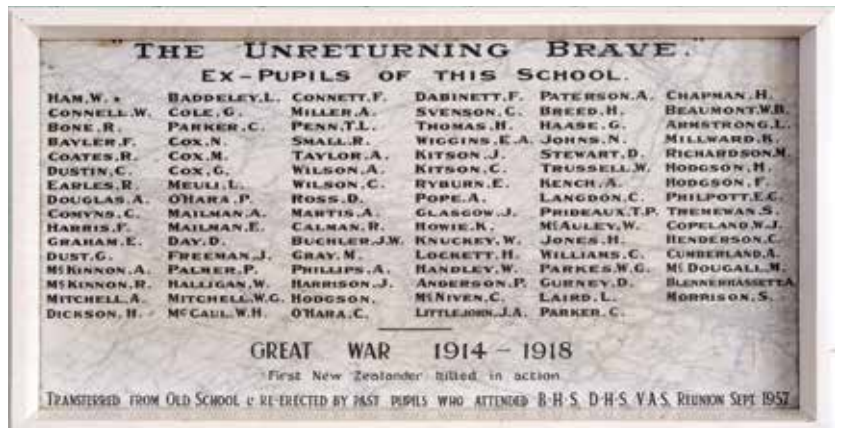
Okoia Hall



Ūpokongaro Hall



Memorial altar in St Margarets Church, Taihape



Whanganui Intermediate School Hall



Roll of Honour, St Johns Church, Matarawa



Cosmopolitan Club (now Club Metro), Whanganui

HOKINGA MAI KI TE KAINGA – RETURN HOME OF MĀORI TROOPS

During the early stages of the war, while there were frequent references to the “Maori Contingent”, officially it was called the Native Contingent. The use of “native” in reference to Māori was not deleted from official use until 1947.

The first Māori Contingent sailed from New Zealand in February 1915 and fought at Gallipoli as combat engineers and snipers. The Contingent numbered 477 men on arrival at Gallipoli and 134 men when leaving. After evacuation from Gallipoli, the surviving men combined with the survivors of the Otago Mounted Rifles to form the New Zealand Pioneer Battalion in Egypt in 1916. Soldiers of Te Hokowhitu a Tu (Māori Pioneer Battalion) performed tasks like constructing trenches and dugouts in the forward battle areas. They also often served as infantry in the front lines. The 26th Pioneer Battalion Reinforcements included many volunteers from the Whanganui region.

Once the New Zealand Government had decided to send a contingent of 500 Māori troops to join the expeditionary force, local iwi were quick to respond. Whanganui soon enlisted its quota of 26 men. They were farewelled at a party on 19 October 1914 organised by Waata Hipango.

The group included three Mete Kingi brothers: 27-year old Teira Hoani, 22-year old Paki Hoani and 18-year old Henare. The Mete Kingi brothers travelled with their comrades up to Avondale for camp training before embarking on the troopship *Warrimoo* at Wellington on 14 February 1915, bound for Egypt.

All three Mete Kingi brothers served at Gallipoli, but Teira Hoani paid the ultimate price, killed in action on 8 August 1915 during the ill-fated attack on Chunuk Bair. Both Henare and Paki fell sick and spent time in hospitals. In April 1916, the Māori Contingent moved to the Western Front with the rest of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. Henare died in action on 14 September 1916 while serving with the New Zealand Signal Corps on the Somme. Early in 1917, Paki was seconded to return to New Zealand for a short time, by now promoted to the rank of 2nd lieutenant. He visited Whanganui on leave in May 1917 where he was welcomed home to Pūtiki in great style.

A brass plaque commemorating his brothers had been installed in the old Pūtiki church a few weeks before and was later moved to the new St Pauls Memorial Church, built in 1937. It was unusual for a New Zealand soldier to return home during his war service but Paki Mete Kingi had a job to do in New Zealand, helping to prepare another group of reinforcements for the Pioneer Māori Battalion (as the Contingent was now known). He sailed back on TS *Willochra* to Liverpool with the reinforcements and by February 1918 was back at the Front.

The troopship *Westmoreland* brought Paki and the other men from Whanganui and the West Coast when they returned home in April 1919. From Auckland, they took the train to Whanganui where they received a hero's welcome on 7 April. A new whare kai (dining hall) was specially built at Pūtiki marae to accommodate the numbers attending the hui, which lasted for nine days. Dr Maui Pomare was amongst the dignitaries who formally welcomed the Māori Pioneer Battalion home.

The Māori War Memorial at Pākaitore-Moutoa Gardens recalls the service of Whanganui men in World War I. The names of 17 Toa Māori (warriors) who were killed in action or died of wounds are transcribed onto the tablets at the base of the memorial. Many of these names are also on other memorials elsewhere in our district.

Māori Contingent on parade

Photographer: C W Connell, Egypt, 1915
Whanganui Regional Museum Collection 1966.142.4 32A



LE QUESNOY ADDITION

Further research found that two Whanganui Collegiate School old boys died at Le Quesnoy. They were Captain Arthur Blennerhassett and Sergeant Ernest Rose, both killed on 4 November 1918, a mere week before the Armistice.

WELCOME HOME FROM CITIZENS OF WANGANUI

This printed illuminated address welcomed home the servicemen of the Whanganui district with fine words and an acknowledgment of their bravery. The address, with a border adorned with flowers, the Wanganui city crest and a panoramic photograph of the town and river taken from Durie Hill, also has a red wax seal of the Corporation of Wanganui and is signed by hand by the Mayor, Councillors and Burgesses and Town Clerk of the Borough of Wanganui.



Illuminated Address to Allied Forces
Printer: Wanganui Herald, 1919
Whanganui Regional Museum Collection 1802.1028

The address reads:

At a Public Meeting of Citizens held at Wanganui on the 30th day of June 1919, the following resolution was unanimously carried:- "That this meeting of Wanganui Citizens expresses its heartfelt gratitude to the Soldiers and Sailors of the Allied Forces whose heroism and devotion during the Great War have achieved the glorious victory and righteous peace which we enjoy. That copies of this resolution be transmitted to the Commanders in Chief of the British and the various Allied Forces, and to General Sir Alexander Russell, the General Officer commanding the New Zealand Division."

A NOT-SO-WARM WELCOME HOME - MANGAPURUA

Towards the end of and after World War I, the New Zealand Government offered land to returned servicemen as part of soldier settlement schemes. Mangapurua, above the Whanganui River, was one of these post-war farming settlements. Thirty families established themselves here, trying to make a living on poor, unworked, remote land. Access was difficult, but for a time, due to much hard work and privation, Mangapurua began to prosper, very modestly.

A wooden swing bridge had been constructed across the Mangapurua Stream in 1919, linking the settlement with the riverboats. The bridge rotted quickly; it was obvious that a new span was needed. A concrete bridge was finally built in 1936, too late, however, for the soldier settlers who had dreams of road access into Raetihi and beyond. The Depression of the 1930s killed the small farming community, most walking off their land, unable to sustain their families on their holdings. By 1942, only three families lived at Mangamahu. All had departed by 1944.

The concrete bridge, now called the Bridge to Nowhere, survives today. It is the destination of hundreds of Whanganui River travellers and trampers. Bitter reminders of that post-war struggle remain in the bush – fallen water tanks and twisted tumbling walls.



The Bridge to Nowhere, 1980s
Photographer: Judith Crawley
Whanganui Regional Museum Collection; Judith Crawley Collection 2012.41.18

*For information on all national activities commemorating the centennial of World War I,
visit the official website www.ww100.govt.nz.*

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