

# THE GREAT WAR TIMES

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FROM THE WHANGANUI  
WWI CENTENARY PROGRAMME



## THE FLANDERS' POPPY

There will be few people who do not recognise the poppy as a symbol of remembrance for soldiers fallen in battle. We use it as a logo on our *Great War Times*.

Most of World War I was fought on the Western Front, a battle line of 700 miles. It is this French and Belgian land, historically known as Flanders, where most of the fighting occurred. As mentioned in previous issues of *The Great War Times*, after trench digging, heavy bombing and shelling, it was a waste land, void of vegetation. People noticed, however, that around the graves of dead soldiers, poppies bloomed. Poppy seeds can lie dormant for years, so on the battle fields of Flanders, after all the explosive upheaval of the ground, the poppies bloomed.

In 1915 after the burial of a friend, Lieutenant John McCrae, a Canadian surgeon, surveyed the graves around him and scribbled in pencil, on a page torn page from his dispatch book, a poem beginning:

*In Flanders' fields the poppies blow*

*Between the crosses, row on row*

*That mark the place ...*

It is written not from the writer's viewpoint, but from that of the dead soldiers, and finishes:

*If you break faith with us who die*

*We shall not sleep.*

The poem was eventually published by *Punch* in December 1915.

On 9 November 1918 at the YMCA Overseas War Secretaries Headquarters in New York, the November edition of *Ladies Home Journal* was left on a desk in the Reading Room. During her break a canteen worker named Moina Belle Michael picked it up and browsed through it. She came across a poem titled *We Shall Not Sleep* (previously published as *In Flanders' Fields*). She

was especially moved by the last lines of the poem. At that moment she made a pledge to keep "the faith".

Moina Michael set about having the poppy adopted as the national symbol of remembrance of the USA. She achieved this in September 1920, when at its national convention, the American Legion did so.

At this convention was a French lady, Madame Anna Guerin. She saw the sale of poppies not only as a remembrance symbol, but also as a fundraiser, benefitting the victims of war. Anna Guerin became determined to introduce the idea of a memorial poppy to all the countries who were allies of France in WWI. She wanted rehabilitation and resettlement of those areas of France ravaged by the war.

Madam Guerin had poppies made in France, and in 1921 she distributed them in the USA. In July 1921 she travelled to Canada and succeeded in getting the Royal Canadian Legion to adopt the poppy as its national flower of remembrance.

She then went to Australia, where the Returned Soldiers and Sailors League of Australia (RSSLA) passed a resolution to wear the poppy on Armistice Day. The poppies would be sold for one shilling. The proceeds would be divided between the French Children's charity and the RSSLA, and a penny would go to the government. In Australia red poppies are worn on Armistice/Remembrance Day and poppy wreathes are laid on ANZAC Day.

In November 1921 Madame Guerin sent some French women to London to sell poppies to the people of London while she went to see Field Marshall Earl Douglas Haig. He had just formed the British Legion to care for the welfare of returned soldiers. The British Legion accepted the poppy as their emblem.

In September 1921 a representative from Madam Guerin came to New Zealand. The New Zealand Returned Service Association (NZRSA) put in an order for 366,000 poppies. Unfortunately, these did not arrive in time for Armistice Day, and the NZRSA decided to sell them on 24 April 1922, in time for the ANZAC

Day commemoration. This practice has continued in New Zealand and become our commemorative day.

Four years after the end of WWI the United States, Canada, Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand had all accepted the poppy as the official remembrance symbol of those who fell in WWI. Today the poppy is also worn to remember all those who have died in any theatre of war since then.

## STREET NAMES RECALL WORLD WAR I

World War I had a greater influence on Whanganui street names than any other conflict before or since. Nine streets owe their names to the Great War, the principal ones being Anzac Parade and Somme Parade, the former commemorating the landing at Anzac Cove at Gallipoli in 1915, and the latter the Battle of the Somme on the Western Front in 1916.

The Gonville Town Board was very patriotic about naming streets after residents killed overseas. Dustin Street is after Claude Dustin, the first person from the area killed on active service. The second person killed, William Gunn, was also recognised in Gunn Street. Also in Gonville, Cavell Place was named for the British nurse, Edith Cavell, who was shot by the Germans in 1915 for helping some 200 Allied soldiers escape from German-occupied Belgium.



Postcard of the Nurse Edith Cavell Memorial, erected in Brussels in Belgium after World War I to commemorate Miss Cavell who was shot by the Germans

Whanganui Regional Museum Collection ref: 1964.94.3

In Wanganui East, Falkland Street commemorates the Battle of the Falkland Islands in 1914, when a British fleet decisively defeated a German fleet. Kitchener Street is named after Field Marshall Lord Kitchener, who became Britain's Secretary of State for War in 1914. He organised the largest volunteer army that Britain had seen and

oversaw a significant expansion of materials production to fight on the Western Front. Jellicoe Street remembers Lord Jellicoe, Admiral of the British Fleet and later a New Zealand Governor-General.

On St Johns Hill, Krulls Lane, named for a German, Frederick Augustus Krull (in 1871 appointed the Honourary Consul for the German Empire in New Zealand), was renamed Oakland Avenue.

The WWI street names followed those marking the Boer War (1899-1902), the first war abroad to which New Zealand had sent troops. This war produced two street names in Wanganui East, White and Symonds Streets. Both were named after British generals in that war. Symonds Street was later incorporated into Raine Street.

The town's enthusiasm for naming streets with a war theme had faded by World War II. That conflict produced just one name, Victory Place, a dead-end street off Somme Parade.

This article is based on information from *Streets of Wanganui* by Athol L Kirk (1978) and was written by David Scoullar

## ALERT!

Whanganui District Council has confirmed it will fund the addition of poppies to some street signs with world war-related names.



## WAITŌTARA STORIES

There is a beautiful old hand-written Roll of Honour in St Hilda in the Woods Church at Ngāmatapouri in the Waitōtara Valley. It records the names of 36 World War I servicemen who called Waitōtara Valley home. Seven of these men were killed in action.

### The Annabell Brothers

Three of the four sons of Joseph and Theresa Annabell of the Waitōtara Valley went off to war. Fred, the oldest, had just started a six week bush-felling contract when war was declared and enlisted as soon as it was finished. He was killed at the battle of the landing at Gallipoli, age 23 years. His younger brother Bernard left for war in 1916. He was badly wounded, and for the rest of his life had a limp, but he returned to the Annabell family

farm and married Kathleen Haddow. Many years later he recorded his experiences in his book *Ngamatapouri*, about life in the Waitōtara Valley in the settler days. A third son, Ernest, also returned and married Lyla Treadwell in 1925.

### **The Chesswas Brothers**

The Chesswas family grew up in the bush, the boys helping their father Jack to develop their farm and a family saw mill business. Herbert (Bert) was the first son to go to war in 1916. The other three followed the next year. Bert married an English nurse named Eva. The couple settled in England. After Eva's death many years later, Bert was travelling back to New Zealand and died on the journey home. Harry was severely wounded during the war, and lived with a bad limp; he never returned to Waitōtara. Arthur and Frank went back to the farm in the Makakaho Valley. Frank died aged 48 of a heart attack. To have all four brothers survive the Great War was fortunate, and rare; one in five New Zealand serving men was killed.

### **Pearce Thomas**

Another man on the Roll of Honour, who never returned to his wife and two children in the Waitōtara Valley, was Joseph Pearce Thomas, known as Pearce. He married Edith, the older sister of the Annabell brothers. Before the war he often worked with the Annabell brothers. Together with Edith's sister Violet and her husband John Washington, Pearce and Edie (as she was called) bought the Ngāmatapouri Store. Violet and John continued to run the store for the next 40 years. Pearce enlisted and sailed to war at the end of 1917 when Edie was pregnant with their second child. Pearce was killed in France in July 1918. Edie stayed on in the valley for many years. She moved to Whanganui in the 1950s and died in 1978 at the age of 92. Her house is now the Ngāmatapouri School House.

### **Frank Pearce**

Frank was head prefect at Wanganui Collegiate School. He was nominated for a Rhodes scholarship, but the war made it impossible for him to take it on. He enlisted in 1917, attained the rank of 2nd lieutenant and had two lucky escapes from death during his service. The first occurred when a bullet was deflected by the silver hip flask he was carrying in his left breast pocket. The second was when he was shot in the back several times and lived to tell the tale, no damage being done to his vital organs. After a long convalescence in Britain he returned to the farm at Makakaho Valley. He lived until 1951 and was very active in the community, serving on the Pātea Council, involved in the annual sheep fairs at Ngāmatapouri and leading the Home Guard during World War II.

Thanks to Jacq Dwyer, President of Pātea Historical Society for compiling this account.

# **CAMERON JOHN CAMPION**

## **FROM OKIRAE STATION**

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The June 2015 issue of *The Great War Times* contained an article about Cameron Campion's experience at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915. The injury that he received there, a compound fracture of the humerus near the right elbow, resulted in his arm being "useless for firing a rifle", according to the medical report.

Campion recovered, re-joining his unit in June 1915, and was promoted to Sergeant. On 7 August 2015 he was wounded for a second time in the Dardanelles and transferred to England where he was admitted to the Endell Military Hospital in London.

While there he wrote an amusing account of the hospital personnel to his parents. "This hospital is run entirely by women - all red hot suffragettes, of course ... I had just about made up my mind that women nurses, where war work was concerned, were a dead failure ... It needs women of strong character and innate refinement. We have them here in plenty. Somehow I couldn't place any confidence in a woman doctor - which only goes to show how hard old prejudices and habits grip one ...".

Cameron married an English nurse, Frances Phillips, in November 1915 and was invalided back to Australia in June 1916 for home service. In September 1916 the pair travelled to Whanganui, staying at the Braeburn Hotel and visiting the Campion family at his old home, Okirae Station, near Fordell. On his return to Australia he entered the Duntroon Military College, an Army Officer Training School, and then in October he returned to duty at the Victoria Barracks in Sydney. Cameron departed for the Suez Canal in September 1917 and was stationed at the School of Instruction at Moascar, where troops were trained.

He was discharged from the Army in July 1919. Post war, Cameron was a manager at Glenburn Station, Wairarapa (1924) and Oruawharo at Takapau, Hawkes Bay (1928). In 1932 he and his brother Roy bought two blocks of land at Kapakapa near Whangaehu, land originally part of Okirae Station.

Cameron returned to Okirae Station in the 1950s, living in a homestead near the old woolshed. He was a wonderful horseman and he hosted annual pony club camps at the woolshed until 1966, leading riders on treks over Okirae to the Tūrakina River every year. Cameron John Campion died in 1967.

# AOTEA CONVALESCENT HOME A RANGITIKEI CONNECTION

Established in Heliopolis, a suburb of Cairo, in 1915, the Aotea Convalescent Home was a haven to many sick and wounded New Zealand servicemen until 1919. The idea of a convalescent home in Egypt had its genesis with the MacDonald sisters of Manawatū, Elizabeth (Betty) MA, BCom and FIANZ, and Wilhelmina (Mina), who linked up with Mysie McDonnell of Bulls. They drew in Ruth Cameron (a niece of Mysie) and Lena McLaren from Masterton. The New Zealand Government gave permission for the venture and fundraising started. Balls were held, significant funding given by Speights & Co Brewery of Dunedin and beds were donated. Knitting began in earnest by the ladies of the Whanganui district. Within short six weeks, the Home became a reality.

Joined by Sister Mary Early and Matron Kate Booth, both in the NZ Army Nursing Service, as well as Nurse Nora Hughes, the women set sail from Wellington in September 2015. On 25 November, Aotea opened at Prince Ibrahim Halim's Palace in Heliopolis, close to the New Zealand General Hospital. Almost immediately the Home was

filled with convalescing soldiers, too well for hospital but not yet fit for combat.

Aotea offered the boys (as patients were known) everything from hot scones to tennis. It had a good library and devised many activities for the men, such as cards, camp concerts and scenic drives.

One patient claimed that "within its four walls the trenches are forgotten, there is no parade ground, no

bully beef and biscuits and no red tape". By January 1916 beds increased to around 80, eventually growing to 250. Another home was established under canvas which housed a further 300 beds during a malaria outbreak.

Aotea was paid for and supported privately until its closure in 1919. "May the good people of Wanganui, Wairarapa, and Rangitikei who are primarily responsible for AOTEA be assured of the great success that has attended their Home", wrote The Gunner, in *Te Korero Aotea*, a booklet produced by Aotea patients. A magazine, *The Aotean*, was also written and published by the patients. It printed war news, accounts of activities, stories and jokes and praise for the Aotea and its staff.

Mina MacDonald, Betty MacDonald, Mysie McDonnell and Sister Early all received an MBE in recognition of their services during the Great War.

Thanks to Roz Grant of Tūrakina who supplied the notes for this article.

## BOOK REVIEW

### *Make Her Praises Heard Afar: The Hidden History of New Zealand Women in World War I* By Jane Tolerton

Perturbed by the lack of written narrative about women's active role in World War I, Jane Tolerton did three years of solid research to document and publicise the stories of over 1,000 New Zealand women who worked in the war effort overseas. Many did not fit into the generally well-known categories of nurse or voluntary aid. The author managed to bring to light doctors, dentists, ambulance drivers, munitions workers, mathematicians, hospital managers and photographers in her book. Many New Zealand women living in London at the outbreak of the war joined voluntary organisations in Britain, and until now, their lives as servicewomen may have been unacknowledged in their own country.

Jane Tolerton is the acclaimed author of two books on the life of Ettie Rout who also served during World War I, and a range of other war-themed projects. *Make Her Praises* can only add to Tolerton's formidable reputation; this is a highly recommended read. A request has been made to the Whanganui District Library for a copy of this book to be added to the lending collection.



*The Aotean*, Volume I, Number 1, March 3, 1916. The front cover features a photograph of the Convalescent Home in Heliopolis, Cairo

Whanganui Regional Museum Collection  
ref: 1802.3761

*For information on all national activities commemorating the centennial of World War I, visit the official website [www.ww100.govt.nz](http://www.ww100.govt.nz).*