

Maxwell War Memorial/Waitotara County

War Memorial



Location: Maxwell, State Highway 3

Heritage NZ Pouhere Taonga

List Number: Nil

Physical Description: The memorial is constructed of shell rock and has a cross above an obelisk with a stepped base. There are bronze plaques at the base of the obelisk

Other known names: Maxwell War Memorial, Maxwelltown War Memorial

Current Use: War memorial

Former Uses: War memorial

Heritage Status:

District Plan Class: Class B

Architectural Style: Obelisk

Date of Construction: 1921

Materials: shell rock, bronze plaques

Registered owner:

Legal Description:

History: Commonly known as the 'Maxwell War Memorial', the towering war memorial in that rural town is in fact the Waitotara County Council's war

Register Item Number:

368

Building Type:

- Residential
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Recreation
- Institutional
- Agriculture
- Other

Significance:

- Archaeological
- Architectural
- Historic
- Scientific
- Technological
- Cultural

Thematic Context

- Early Settlement
- Residential
- Industry
- Agricultural
- Commerce
- Transport
- Civic/Admin
- Health
- Education
- Religion
- Recreation
- Community
- Memorials
- Military

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memorial. It was located in the town as this was deemed to be the central point.

The First World War had only been over a few months when people in the vicinity of Maxwelltown started planning a memorial for their own war dead. A meeting was called for Friday, 30th May 1919 at 8 p.m. *“to devise ways and means for the purpose of setting up a War Memorial for the district.”*ⁱⁱ

In September 1919, the *Wanganui Chronicle* reported that there was *“a movement on foot to erect a memorial to the soldiers of Waitotara County who made the supreme sacrifice in the Great War. Messrs. C.G. Russell, G.S. Russell, and K.H. Cave are taking an active part in the proposal, and have convened a meeting of residents of the Waitotara County, to be held in the County office, Ridgway Street, on Wednesday, 24th inst., at 11 a.m., when the subject will be fully gone into.”*ⁱⁱⁱ

The lengthy report on the meeting was published in the *Wanganui Chronicle* on 25 September 1919 (p. 4). Fifteen ratepayers had attended. Mr W. Morrison, who was voted to the chair, wanted to see a statue or something everlasting. He thought this was the general wish of the people of the district. However, some doubt existed as to whether public bodies could pay for this. He had been advised that legislation was being brought in to validate such expenditure. Fred Allen opposed any money being spent on anything that was not useful, and was against a statue. He would like a memorial road or a bridge where memorial tablets could be installed. Mr Burnet wanted a statue of a mounted trooper. *“He was not in favour of Waitotara burying its identity in a large Wanganui scheme.”* Another man said that the people of Brunswick wanted their own memorial. The meeting concluded having passed motions to the effect that a soldier’s memorial be erected, and that the matter be placed in the hands of the Waitotara County Council.

In mid-October 1919, members of the Waitotara County Council visited available sites for the proposed memorial. *“Two sites, both excellent for the purpose, were under offer to the Government. Cr. Farley had offered a site on the top of the Goat Valley Hill, but this was considered to be not quite central enough, and likely, from the ever expanding growth of Wanganui town, to be absorbed into the town, and to lose its distinction as a County memorial. The other site was one offered by Mr Davis, on the main road at Maxwelltown. This without a doubt*

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is an ideal spot for such a tribute being erected on, being a rising piece of ground opposite the store, and standing about 1½ chains from the road, while it is situated in the heart of the County.”

The Council unanimously decided to recommend the Maxwelltown site, and were also of one mind on the need for one comprehensive monument.^{iv} The next meeting of residents, on 22nd October, gave a “*hearty vote of thanks*” to Davis Bros. of Maxwelltown, “*for the generous gift of a site for the memorial.*”^v

Almost two years later, on the seventh anniversary of the start of the First World War, Lieut-Colonel W.H. Cunningham unveiled the Waitotara County war memorial on the Maxwelltown site. The memorial, which was designed by Wanganui architects, C.R. Ford and R.G. Talboys,^{vi} was described as a Celtic cross, constructed from shell rock from the county, and towering 45 feet in height. It was visible for miles around, and “*will perpetuate the memory of gallant men from the Waitotara district who gave their lives in the Great War.*” Despite the “*incessant heavy rain*”, a large number of people attended the ceremony – with the speeches being relocated to the Maxwelltown Hall.

Mr W. Morrison said that “*in erecting the memorial their aim was something that would be lasting so that future generations would know that the men who had gone from the district had not died in vain. The names had not yet been put on the monument, and they would be pressed to get any if they had been omitted. The memorial was erected by public subscription and a grant from the county. To Mr John Davis they were indebted for a magnificent gift of two acres for the site. They were also indebted to other generous givers. In selecting the site they had looked to the future, as it was easy to predict that at some time Maxwelltown would become the centre of a great population. He hoped that the memorial would stand for all time so that future generations would remember the sacrifices made by the soldiers who went from Waitotara County.*”

The unveiling ceremony, which occurred in the midst of a heavy rainstorm, revealed a bronze tablet with Abraham Lincoln’s words from the dedication of the Field of Gettysburg: “*Let us here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain.*”^{vii}

On Anzac Day 1952, a plaque to the dead from the 1939-1945 war joined those

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already on the memorial.^{viii}

In mid-May 1923, a meeting of Waitotara residents considered the matter of raising more money toward another local war memorial. The new proposal was a set of memorial gates to be installed at the Waitotara Domain on Station Road. The committee already held about £100 toward the purpose. A “lengthy discussion” followed and it was finally decided to canvass the whole district.^{ix} In mid-July the Waitotara War Memorial Committee advised that it proposed to erect iron gates with concrete pillars on the Waitotara Domain road frontage at a cost of £250 as a war memorial for the district.^x

Laraine Sole’s book, *The Way We Were: The Settlement of Maxwell and Waitotara, 1850-1930* (pp., 111-113), includes an early photo of the Maxwell memorial with a First World War field gun on display alongside it. These were captured guns which were distributed around the country as trophies following the war – however the fate of this gun was not researched. Sole states that the stone for the memorial came from the Pukerimu Pit on Buntings’ land.

George Abbott’s book *Maxwell Nukumarū 1988: A History of the District* (p. 99) records that it was “into the 1920s” before the memorial listed the names of the district’s dead. At the time, the *Wanganui Chronicle* reportedly described the monument as “noble in proportion, chaste in design.” In response, working bees were immediately recruited to plant the memorial’s grounds, with trees being chosen by the Wanganui reserves superintendent, Mr C.R. Tucker. The local Country Women’s Institute took care of the War Memorial garden, including its design. This included small plots laid out in the shape of crosses, and holly trees relocated from where they had been planted in memory of the district’s war dead.^{xi}

Bibliography

Abbott, George, *Maxwell Nukumarū 1988: A History of the District* (Wanganui, 1998)

Melody, Paul, (ed.), *Bush, People and Pasture: The Story of the Waitotara County* (Wanganui, 1983)

Sole, Laraine, *The Way We Were: The Settlement of Maxwell and Waitotara*,

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1850-1930 (Waverley, 1990)

Also newspapers and online articles as referred to in the footnotes.

Architect/Designer: Unknown

History of changes:

Date Period: The monument was constructed in 1921 to commemorate the lives of Waitotara County soldiers who lost their lives in the Great War.

Rarity / Special Features:

Integrity: The monument appears to be in reasonable condition located in its original position.

Representativeness: The monument is similar to many others of similar ilk.

Context/Group Value: The monument remains in its original position.

Diversity (Form and Features):

Fragility / Vulnerability: As a masonry structure, it is potentially vulnerable to earthquake damage.

Summary of Significance:

Architectural Qualities

The monument was designed by well-known local architect Robert Talboys who designed a number of commemorative structures in the District.

Historic Qualities

The memorial commemorates the lives of soldiers from Waitotara County who died in the Great War. The memorial is of local significance.

Cultural Qualities

The structure is commemorative of local citizens who died during World War One and is a focus for the local community to celebrate the actions and lives of fallen soldiers.

Reference Source:

Associated Pictures:

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Date of Survey: 2012

Prepared by: Ian Bowman and Val Burr

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- ⁱ New Zealand History online, 'Maxwell War Memorial': <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/wanganui-memorialsmaxwell-war-memorial-wanganui-first-world-war-memorials>
- ⁱⁱ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 30 May 1919, p. 1
- ⁱⁱⁱ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 11 September 1919, p. 4. Also W.C. 19 September 1919, p. 4
- ^{iv} *Wanganui Chronicle*, 15 October 1919, p. 4
- ^v *Wanganui Chronicle*, 23 October 1919, p. 4
- ^{vi} George Abbott, *Maxwell Nukumarū 1988: A History of the District* (Wanganui, 1998), pp. 192
- ^{vii} *Wanganui Chronicle*, 5 August 1921, p. 4 (7-8)
- ^{viii} Laraine Sole, *The Way We Were: The Settlement of Maxwell and Waitotara, 1850-1930* (Waverley, 1990), p. 112. See also: Maxwell Roll of Honour Text: <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~sooty/maxwellroh.html>
- ^{ix} *Hawera & Normanby Star*, 18 May 1923, p. 4
- ^x *Hawera & Normanby Star*, 11 July 1923, p. 3 Note that in 1939, Maxwell was given a grant to build a memorial hall. This was intended as a memorial to New Zealand's first 100 years, rather than related to a war. (*Evening Post*, 10 June 1939, p. 24 & 15 June 1939, p. 11)
- ^{xi} Abbott, pp. 99 & 184