



Last New Zealanders to die for Victoria



Taranaki men about to join the 2nd Contingent in 1900. From left: B. Veale, T. Richardson, - Fulton, W. Allen, - McKinnon, W. Callaghan, J. Glynes and M. Duggan.

Many years have now elapsed since the death of New Zealand's last veteran of the Boer War. Mr Frederick Mitchell, who died in 1982 at the age of 100 years, served in the war in the Imperial Yeomanry, and was the last of a group of four or five other ex-Imperial forces veterans who outlived the last New Zealand forces man by a good two years.

Gone the old Boer War veterans may be, but it is difficult to forget or ignore the part played by nearly 6500 New Zealanders in the last of the great Victorian wars.

They were only a handful by comparison with the forces of the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and the Cape Colony, but they did their soldiering in an age of opulent and overwhelming patriotism which retains a strong afterglow to this day in the form of monuments of size and number out of all proportion to the effort and the cost.

The war cost New Zealand 70 men killed in action or died from wounds. Another 25 died accidentally, including 16 members of the 8th Contingent killed in a railway accident at Machavie. The greatest killer however, was disease. A variety of pestilences, with enteric fever heading the list, accounted for the lives of a further 133 New Zealanders. Wounded numbered 166.

The cost to North Taranaki was 15 lives, not a big sacrifice in 'world war' terms, but still a significant share of the nation's loss.

That North Taranaki sacrifice is commemorated not in one, but in two quite grand memorials. The first is the opulent fountain, which was brought down from Marsland Hill to become the focal point of the Devon Mall. The second is the big stone cross that stands beside the steps at the entrance to St Mary's Church.

Just as North Taranaki's 15 dead represents a fair proportion of 228 New Zealanders who died in the war, so the list also represents a fair cross section of the way in which the sacrifices were made.

Three of the 15 were killed in action, one died as a result of an accident, two lost their lives in unknown circumstances while serving with other forces, and nine succumbed to disease.

Those killed in action were Sgt Major Sydney Smith (3/1/02), Pvt Harry Finch (24/2/02) and Pvt Lionel Smith (6/5/00). Pte Leolin Hamar Arden died in an accident. Those who died from sickness and disease were Ptes Albert Blyde, Charles Enderby, William Fleetwood, William Goodland, Thomas Hempton, Lewis Newsham, Nathaneil Paterson, John Patterson and Clement Wiggins.

It is interesting to note that three of the latter made it back home to die. Newsham and Fleetwood died in quarantine on Somes Island, while Blyde succumbed to his illness after his arrival back home in Inglewood.

Of the final two, A. Sisley and V. Meredith, nothing is now known of the fates of death, cause of death nor



even the identity of the forces with whom they were serving at the time.



The South African War memorial fountain on its original site on Marsland Hill. It was erected there in 1910 and relocated in the Devon Mall in 1979.

Sisley and Meredith were not expatriate New Zealanders. Like a great many others they were unable to find a place in the New Zealand volunteer force, so went looking elsewhere for a chance to get in on the big adventure.

Indeed, for every man fortunate enough to be accepted into one of the 10 contingents that New Zealand was to send to South Africa, there were another dozen who missed out on selection even though they had all the required qualifications - the main one being, after the right degree of physical fitness, the ability to provide one's own horse. For want of a horse perhaps another dozen more on top of that would have been dissuaded even from putting their names forward.

Many of these men - those who had the money - got over their disappointment by sailing off to another country where there were fewer limitations on numbers. South Africa itself was the most popular destination, and there a number of units were formed, manned almost entirely by volunteers from the four corners of the world. (The man who won South Africa's Queen's

Scarf, Leonard Chadwick, was an American serving in one such unit, Roberts' Horse).

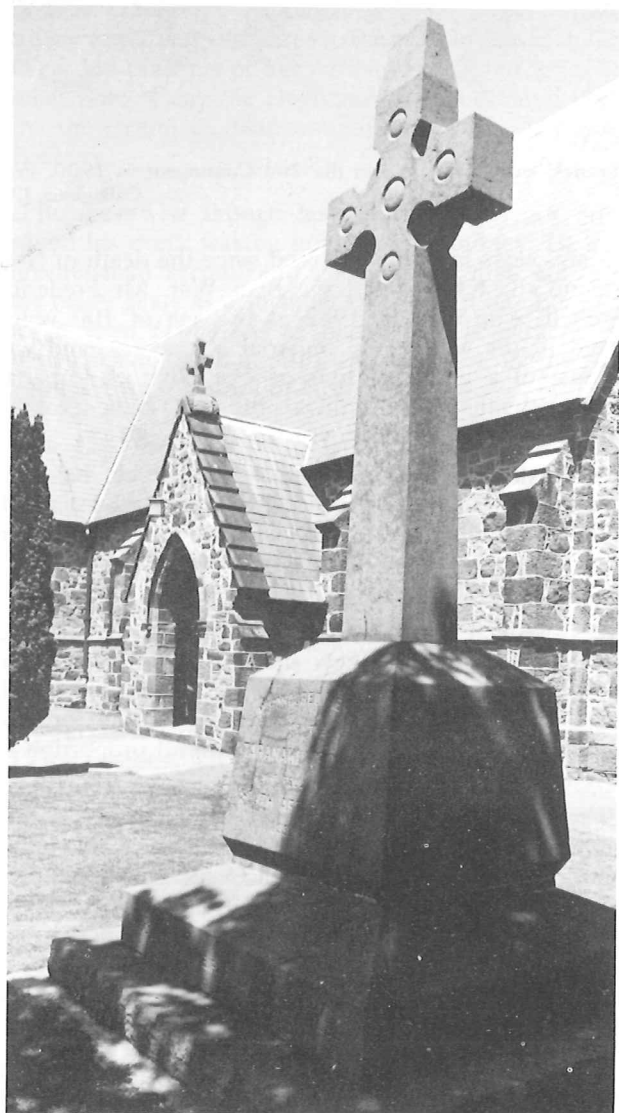
There is an interesting footnote to the story of North Taranaki's war dead. One of the 15, Clement Wiggins, once achieved the remarkable distinction of being memorially honoured seven times.

His name is listed, of course on both the New Plymouth fountain and the St Mary's Church memorial. Then there is his grave, which is located in Germiston in South Africa.

Being originally from Christchurch, his name is also inscribed on a memorial drinking fountain at Sumner and on the Boer War memorial in Christchurch Cathedral, while his family church at Sumner has a stained glass window dedicated to him.

Finally, he once had an individual memorial in Pukekura Park, a grand piece of masonry comprising of an obelisk on a tiered base, surrounded by an iron fence.

This was subscribed to by his former workmates at the Bank of New South Wales and stood on a hill, once always referred to as Monument Hill, in the area between the boathouse lake and Brooklands Road. The monument succumbed to the attentions of vandals in the 1930s and was finally removed and broken up.



The South African War memorial at St Mary's Church.