

New memorial a new beginning for Otakeho

At dawn on ANZAC Day thousands around the country will remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

By that time, Otakeho will already have had its ANZAC commemoration. At 5.30pm on April 24, a service will be held at the Otakeho Hall to not only remember those who fell in past conflicts, but to celebrate the shifting of the war memorial plaques to the new War Memorial outside the Hall.

On the plaques are the names of 10 men from Otakeho. Five died in World War I, then thought of as the war to end all wars. The other five died in the Second World War which started only 21 years after the first one had finished.

There was no service at Otakeho last year, but in previous years a service would be held close to ANZAC Day outside the

Otakeho School.

The school had closed in 2002, and the flagpole which had stood in what students had always referred to as the Teardrop was moved to the wall which held the memorial plaques.

Having to stand with backs to the Surf Highway and compete with the noise of passing traffic which included tankers was never going to be ideal. The school was looking increasingly neglected and there was uncertainty about its future, and with it the wall and memorial plaques.

Otakeho farmer Richard Walker said a trip to Gallipoli where the first ANZACs saw action made him want to do something.

"Standing there where everyone came ashore, thinking about what they had to face and where they had to go was mind boggling," he said. "You could feel the hairs on your arms stand up. We were on a bus trip, and we had Australians and New Zealanders there, and a few were moved to tears."

Shifting the memorial plaques to the nearby Otakeho Hall seemed a good idea. Not only was the road quieter, but it was more conducive to stopping for a chat over tea or coffee after the service rather than hurrying off home.

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The Otakeho War Memorial has a new home at the Otakeho Hall

The Otakeho community group's favoured option was to place the plaques on a specially built stone wall similar to the war memorial at the Okaiawa Cemetery.

Last year they went to the Egmont Plains Community Board and got funding from the Waimate Plains Development Levy to go towards shifting the flag pole from the school to the hall and putting up a new war memorial. The balance of the money was made up by the Otakeho Social Committee.

Callum Mahy of Stone Creations removed the

plaques from the school wall in October last year and started work on the new memorial in February.

"It's all made of granite and it's going to stand the test of time," he said.

He has worked on a number of community projects including the memorial to the victims of the 1953 Tangiwai disaster. He says his next major project is a memorial at the Bayly Road urupa for those who died in the 1918 influenza epidemic.

Among the names listed on the Otakeho Memorial are that of two bomber pilots, Pilot Officers Edgar Lawrence Burke and John Lawrie.

Edgar Burke was the son of well known Rama Road farmer Charles Augustine(Charlie)Burke who did in 1984 aged 99. On May 23, 1944, Edgar's Lancaster bomber failed to return from a bombing mission over Dortmund Germany. His family had always assumed his aircraft had gone missing over the sea, until his brother Maurice was shown a letter from Peter Lonke of the Belgian Air Force addressed to the mayor of Manaiia.

Growing up in Overpelt, Belgium, Lonke had always been fascinated about what his father had told him of an aircraft that had been shot down over their town. Now a sergeant in the Belgian Air Force he had gone looking for this plane and had extracted some of the debris from the plane out of a local swamp. He then had it sent to England where it was identified as the missing ME690 which had failed to return from the raid over Dortmund.

On August 13, 1944, less than three months after ME690 went missing, another Lancaster, G for George, piloted by 21 year-old Pilot Officer John Lawrie, who grew up on his parents' Auroa Road farm was shot down. This time all but one of the crew survived. John Lawrie kept the stricken Lancaster in the air long enough for the rest of the crew to bail out, but couldn't get away himself. Belgian shoemaker and resistance member Nestor van der Heyden gathered up John's remains and hid them from the Nazis. After the war they were recovered and buried with full military

honours.

Other names from World War II included Roy Hastie wkkilled at Sidi Rezegh on November 23, 1941.

And John Denis Burke, cousin of Edgar Burke.

From the First World War, there's Sergeant Outram Marshall Young, a talented rugby player who represented the North Island and died of wounds on the Western Front in 1916. His nephew Venn Young was an MP and cabinet minister, and great nephew Jonathan Young is the current MP for New Plymouth.

Then there's William Kelland Le Fleming who died at Cannock Chase Military Hospital on November 9, 1918, two days before the Armistice

Farmer Dominic Schuler says the new war memorial will be good for Otakeho.

"When was the last time anything significant was done around Otakeho other than closing things down?"

Richard Walker voices similar sentiments.

"This has been a good little team effort with the group we've got. We can now have a pre ANZAC Day service at the hall and a cup



P/O. E. L. Burke, of Manaiia, missing on operations.

Private Officer Edgar Burke



Sargeant Outram Young

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Proud supporter of the Otakeho War Memorial community project

stonecreationsnz@gmail.com
www.stonecreations@kiwi.nz

0508 763 84 37
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Creative Centre & Showroom
25 Upper Pitone rd
off Surf Hi way 45 - New Plymouth