

# Te Kawau Memorial Recreation Centre Iron Gates, 1 Wye Street, Rongotea



Figure 1: The memorial gates in their present context – 2 December 2017

<b>Architect:</b>	Mr Barsanti
<b>Builder:</b>	J P Wilson
<b>Construction Date:</b>	1953
<b>Visible materials:</b>	Galvanised steel gates, 2 x granite plaques fixed to the 1999 building
<b>Architectural Style:</b>	
<b>Use/building type:</b>	Memorial gates
<b>Date and compiler:</b>	Val Burr 2018, Ian Bowman 2020
<b>Heritage NZ Listing</b>	Nil
<b>Proposed ranking:</b>	B

## PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL HISTORY

### Introduction

The memorial gates and plaques now at the Te Kawau Memorial Recreation Centre, were originally installed as part of the Rongotea War Memorial Hall complex that was officially opened on 18 March 1953. A surviving invitation to the event refers to the ‘Rongotea and Districts War Memorial’; to the unveiling of the memorial gates; and to the official opening of the recreation centre. The facility was duly opened by the Governor-General, Sir Willoughby Norrie.<sup>1</sup>

The memorial gates themselves originally consisted of substantial gateposts that had plaques with the names of the soldiers who died in the two world wars, embedded in them. From these gateposts swung two steel gates that have the years “1914.18” and “1939.45” set into them. While the two gates themselves are still fulfilling their original role, the plaques are now built into the façade of the present building.

### The Rongotea War Memorial Sports Centre

The gates and the building they once led to originated from a public meeting held on 19 October 1946, in the Town Board Room of Rongotea’s Coronation Hall. The meeting was convened by William Amey Snr., chairman of the Rongotea Farewell Committee, and Norman Morcom, chairman of the Rongotea-Carnarvon-Tangimoana Patriotic Committee. The aim was to discuss a war memorial for the district. At this time, the types of monuments established after WWI had given way to more useful types of

<sup>1</sup> Vera Hunt, *Campbelltown Rongotea* (Palmerston North, 2011) p. 4

memorial to the losses of WWII. Community halls and other such public facilities were now the new style of war memorial.<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, discussion between the thirty people present at the Rongotea meeting resulted in a motion that was carried unanimously. This was that Rongotea's new War Memorial would take the form of a Community Sports Centre. It was also agreed unanimously that the new facility would be built on the grounds of Rongotea School.

The Wanganui Education Board architect, Mr Barsanti, was charged with designing the project and supervising it through to its completion. Tenders for the Hall and the Memorial Gates were in due course called, and the successful tenderer was that of J.P. Wilson, at £7,292.15s.6d. The building was completed by October 1952.

Those present at the official opening of the building on 18 March 1953, in addition to Sir Willoughby Norrie and the local dignitaries, included the Hon. W.E. Bodkin MP, Minister of Internal Affairs, and Manawatu MP, Sir Matthew Oram. The local RSA formed a Guard of Honour, and the RNZAF Band (Ohakea) also played at the event.<sup>3</sup>

The *Manawatu Standard* of 18 March 1953 (p. 8) introduced its article on the unveiling ceremony with the following quote from the Governor-General: *"The conception of the Rongotea and district war memorial is an ambitious one, and aims to provide sporting and cultural facilities for both young and old. I can think of few finer memorials and I congratulate all those who have worked so hard for this object."*

Norrie, who was paying his first visit to the Manawatu, said that he had served alongside New Zealanders in both world wars. He added that of a town of about 1,000 people, a total of 103 men and three nurses had served in the force (in WWII).

Vera Hunt, in *Campbelltown Rongotea* (p. 308), describes the official opening from the point of view of the Rongotea School pupils: *"18/03/1953 – School closed. Vice Regal visit to Rongotea to officially open the Memorial Recreation Centre. His Excellency the Governor-General, Sir Willoughby Norrie made his first Official visit to the Manawatu to open this wonderful sports complex. The Rongotea School children were in attendance, plus other neighbouring school pupils who were given a school holiday by the Governor-General on behalf of the Queen."*

### **Te Kawau Memorial Recreation Centre**

The Rongotea Memorial Hall was demolished in the 1990s to enable the construction on the same site of the larger and more efficient Te Kawau Memorial Recreation Centre. The former Coronation Hall in Thames Street was also disposed of as part of this transition. The new building was officially opened on 25 June 1999.<sup>4</sup>

As well as Rongotea's memorial gates and Roll of Honour plaques, the entrance foyer of the Te Kawau Memorial Recreation Centre also houses the Roll of Honour Boards from Clydesdale School (WWII), Glen Oroua (WWI & WWII) and Taikorea (WWI & WWII).<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Jock Phillips, *To the Memory: New Zealand's War Memorials* (Nelson, 1916), pp. 172-193

<sup>3</sup> Hunt, p. 47-48

<sup>4</sup> Hunt, p. 48

<sup>5</sup> Peter Olsen & Janet Doyle, *Communities Remember World War One: Memorials of the Manawatu District* (Feilding, 2014), p. 57

## ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

The memorial comprises a pair of galvanised steel gates giving access to a playing field behind the Te Kawau Memorial Recreation Centre. The gates include the numerals 1914.18 on the north gate and 1939.45 on the south gate. There are crosses in each corner of each gate.

The roll of honour memorial plaques are fixed to either side of a central window on the north elevation of the Recreation Centre. The plaques are in pink granite with the names of the servicemen inscribed on each.

NZ History identifies 254 war memorial gates, many of which are outside schools and most are more substantial than those at Te Kawau. Most have masonry posts onto which are fixed memorial plaques and/or arches onto which are fixed plaques.

The gates are adjacent to the Recreation Centre which is at the south eastern corner of Rongotea. Two other memorials are located in the square in the centre of Rongotea on the junction of Thames and Mersey Streets. Rongotea is a small settlement to the west of Palmerston North and is largely flat, rural farmland.

## SUMMARY OF HERITAGE VALUES

The war memorial has **low** to **high local** significance for **architectural, technological, rarity, representativeness, group, authenticity, people, event, pattern, cultural, public esteem, commemorative** and **education** values.

The memorial has **low architectural** and **technological** values as a very prosaic set of war memorial gates using common materials, style and symbolism of the period.

The memorial has **low rarity** but **moderate representativeness** and **group** values as one of many memorials erected throughout the region and New Zealand to remember fallen and serving armed soldiers in World War One and Two.

The memorial has **high authenticity** as they remain on their original site.

The memorial has **moderate historic people, event, pattern and cultural identity, public esteem, commemorative** and **education** values as a war memorial commemorating those who died in World Wars I and II and where memorial services have been held.

## SOURCES

### Printed Sources

Benson, Pamela, *History of Rongotea: For Rongotea School Centenary 1881-1981* (Rongotea, 1981), pp. 102-103

Hunt, Vera, *Campbelltown Rongotea* (Palmerston North, 2011)

*Manawatu Standard*: 18 March 1953, p. 8, 'Memorial Unveiled'

*Manawatu Times*: 19 March 1953, p. 5, 'What women are doing'; 19 March 1953, 'Governor-General Opens Rongotea and District War Memorial'

Olsen, Peter, & Doyle, Janet, *Communities Remember World War One: Memorials of the Manawatu District* (Feilding, 2014)

Phillips, Jock, *To the Memory: New Zealand's War Memorials* (Nelson, 1916)

IMAGES

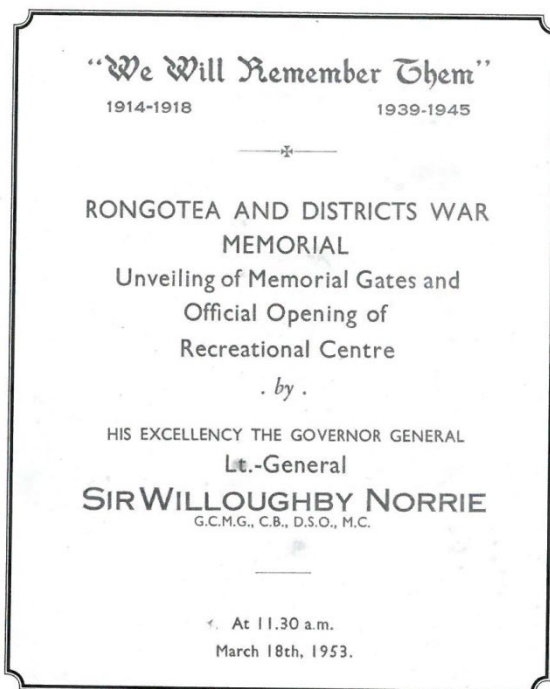


Figure 2: The official opening notice for the unveiling of the memorial gates (Source: Hunt: p. 4)



THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL, SIR WILLOUGHBY NORRIE, speaking yesterday at the official opening ceremony of the Rongotea and District War Memorial. The splendid hall is in the background and one of the two veiled memorial tablets in the gate pillars can be seen at the left. \*

Figure 3: *Manawatu Times*, 19 March 1953, p. 8



SIR WILLOUGHBY TALKING TO THE SCHOOL CHILDREN. "Thank you, your Excellency" they chorused enthusiastically when, on behalf of Queen Elizabeth, he granted them a full day's holiday. A youthful leader among the children later called for three cheers which were lustily given.

Figure 4: *Manawatu Times*, 19 March 1953, p. 8



*War Memorial Hall*

Figure 5: The original setting of the memorial gates are shown in the lower corner of this photo (Source: Hunt: p. 4)



*Te Kawanui Memorial Recreation Centre*

Figure 6: The present facility (Source: Hunt: p. 4)



**Figure 7:** The Te Kawau Memorial Recreation Centre, with the two plaques from the original gateposts at the bases of the two flagpoles. The gates are open at left in this photo – taken 2 December 2017.