

Taikorea War Memorial, North-Eastern Quadrant of Douglas Square, Rongotea



Architect:	
Builder:	
Construction date:	1920
Visible materials:	Concrete base, chamfered, stepped basalt plinth, granite shaft
Architectural style:	Obelisk
Use/building type:	Memorial
Date and compiler:	Val Burr 2018, Ian Bowman 2020
Heritage NZ Listing:	Nil
Proposed ranking:	B

PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL HISTORY

Introduction

The Taikorea War Memorial was originally installed on the north-west corner of Couper and Taikorea Roads, where it was unveiled on 16 July 1920. Three re-locations and at least two new base designs later, it now stands in Douglas Square, Rongotea, where it was rededicated in 2010. It has also had a replacement plaque, another new base and a further slight relocation since then.

Planning the Memorial

The *Manawatu Standard* of 27 May 1916 (p. 7) reported on early plans to compile a list of Taikorea men who were serving in WWI: *“From our midst will shortly be farewelled a further batch of recruits, possibly the last under the volunteer system. In due course the full list of names will be published, to their lasting honour and credit. Considerable difficulty is being experienced by the headmaster of our school in securing particulars sufficient to enable him to complete a full and exact ‘Roll of Honour’ out of the large number of ‘old boys’ who have joined the colours. He will be very grateful for assistance in this direction from past and present residents of our beautiful and prosperous district.”*

In due course the memorial listed the names of twenty-six men who served in the First World War, of whom seven had lost their lives. Of the deceased, four of the seven consist of two sets of brothers. James Michael O’Grady (29) was killed in action at Gallipoli on 4 June 1915¹, while Daniel Francis O’Grady (24) was killed in France on 13 September 1918. A third brother, Patrick Timothy O’Grady, survived the war and is also named on the memorial. The second set of brothers included George Barnard Russell Taylor (32), who died of wounds in Belgium on 7 December 1917, and Charles Brian Taylor (21), who was killed in action in France on 30 June 1918. The remaining three deceased include: Thomas Lyons (21), a trainee school teacher and a former pupil of Taikorea School, who died of wounds in France on 8 April 1918²; and Harry Hardy (28), who was killed in France on 24 August 1918, had lived at Taikorea for some years.³ The last to die was Harry Thistlewaite (28), who had been a farm labourer at Taikorea before enlisting in 1916.⁴ He was killed in action in France on 9 September 1918. His name is spelt incorrectly as ‘Thistlethwaite’ on the memorial.

Having lost five of the district’s seven dead in the previous five months, it is perhaps no surprise that plans were soon underway toward erecting a memorial to the local men from the area who had fought and in some cases died. However, the initial meeting on the topic did not go very well. The *Manawatu Standard* on 16 October 1918 (p. 6) recorded the following:

“The meeting called recently for the purpose of erecting some sort of a memorial to the local boys who have taken their part and in some cases given their lives for the sake of humanity in this wretched war, was very poorly attended, due, it is believed, to the fact that insufficient publicity was given to the matter. Consequently nothing final could be arranged, but it was decided to send two residents to Palmerston to make enquiries as to what would be the best course to take, and it is understood that as a result of such enquiries there are some very good specimens of art in the shape of rolls of honour to be placed before the next meeting, which will be duly advertised in the ‘Standard.’

“I might mention for the information of the Taikorea settlers that as far as the previous meeting is concerned, it was unanimously decided that the district should not be canvassed for donations to the project, and Taikorea settlers who are in sympathy with the cause are asked to accept this intimation to look out for the next meeting, and make a point of being present to help formulate some scheme of acknowledgment to the boys who have done their bit.”

Over the next few weeks, Taikorea, along with the rest of the country, was struck by the Influenza Epidemic and no notice of a subsequent community meeting was located during this study.

¹ *Manawatu Standard*, 30 July 1915, p. 5. Note that he enlisted under the name James Hurley, which was his mother’s maiden name. See also <http://www.aucklandmuseum.com/war-memorial/online-cenotaph/> and search his two names.

² *NZ Times*, 29 April 1918, p. 3

³ *Manawatu Standard*, 17 September 1918, p. 2

⁴ *Manawatu Times*, 10 June 1916, p. 7. His name is incorrectly spelt ‘Thistlethwaite’ on the memorial, ref. also <http://www.aucklandmuseum.com/war-memorial/online-cenotaph/> and search “Thistlewaite”.

However, the task duly progressed and the Taikorea Soldiers' Memorial was unveiled at 2:00pm on Friday, 16th July 1920.⁵

No published report on the unveiling of the monument appears to be available, however, the memorial stood on a substantial four-stepped concrete base on a piece of the farm of Michael Lyons – whose son Thomas is one of those named as killed on the memorial. The memorial was on the north-western corner of the intersection of Taikorea and Couper Roads – across the road from Taikorea School.⁶

In 1927, the lack of protection of the memorial led to an exchange by aggrieved correspondents to the *Manawatu Times*. Accordingly 'Disgusted' wrote: "*Sir, —It is some years now since the above was erected at the Cross Road, near the school at Taikorea, and since the erection no steps have been taken to build a curbing around the same or fence it in, and cattle and sheep can be found herded around the stone. I believe there is a fund available for such a purpose, and I think it is time something was done in the matter.*"⁷

In response, local resident L.C. Algar wrote: *(To the Editor.) "Sir, —My attention having been drawn to a letter in a recent issue of your journal re the above, I feel called upon to make some reply to 'Disgusted' Firstly then I may be excused for condemning with no ill-feeling the attitude taken up by your correspondent not because there is no truth in what he says—it is truth in the main. Still, I think if he (or she) is or was interested in the memorial, the position as things stand to-day must be known to him and that being so it was quite easy to get the particulars and, give some assistance to overcome the difficulty that at present exists. That there is money available to complete the job is true but there exists also a very serious difficulty (which I am not going to discuss here) in the way of completing the work although I sincerely wish that could be done. I would submit in all sincerity to your correspondent that a better course to follow than rushing into print in this matter would be to join up with those and assist them to make the monument representative of the cause of its promotion. This I hope he will do at a meeting to be held shortly.*"⁸

Perhaps there was an ongoing problem with the actual ownership of the small bit of land the memorial was sited upon, but a photo of the memorial on the original site, shows a concrete and pipe fence surrounding it.⁹ Ellen Lyons, the wife of property owner, Michael Lyons, died in January 1926, followed by Michael's death in December 1938.

The book *Taikorea School: 70th Anniversary 1888-1958* (p. 37) records a memory of the memorial by a teacher, Mr J.C. Ward, who taught at the school between 1931 and 1936: "*Before each Anzac Day we made wreaths and marched quietly over the road to the memorial. The floral emblems were laid in memory of those from the little community who had given their lives or their services in World War I, and maybe since then more names have been added. But on those occasions we bowed our heads to Laurence Binyon's moving lines: 'Age will not weary them, Nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun, And in the morning, We shall remember them.'*"

Relocations

The memorial remained on its original site until 1980, and the reason for its relocation then was that this site was on privately-owned farmland, and the local residents argued that it should be located

⁵ *Manawatu Standard*, 15 July 1920, p. 1

⁶ See Remail Hehir (ed.), *Taikorea 1888-1988* (Palmerston North, 1988), pp. 19-22; and Vera Hunt, *Campbelltown Rongotea*, p. 285

⁷ *Manawatu Times*, 3 May 1927, p. 6

⁸ *Manawatu Times*, 11 May 1927, p. 6

⁹ Peter Olsen & Janet Doyle, *Communities Remember World War One: Memorials of the Manawatu District* (Feilding, 2014), p. 61

on public land.¹⁰ One source stated that the farm had been sold, and that this was the reason for shifting the memorial.¹¹

The memorial was duly moved across the road to the Taikorea School grounds (at 657 Taikorea Road), where it stood near the Couper Road end of the main school building.¹² A photo taken of it at the school in 1988 indicates that its base was now quite basic.¹³

The closure of the school in December 2001, and the site's eventual sale¹⁴, resulted in the memorial being on the move again. Its next stop was along the road a short distance to a site alongside the Taikorea Coronation Hall.

The Taikorea Coronation Hall had been built in 1911, with a memorial wing (containing toilets, dressing rooms, a supper room and a kitchen) having been added to it in about 1952, in memory of those who fought in that war. A Roll of Honour board for the WWII servicemen was also built into the exterior of the front wall of the new extension.¹⁵ In 1988, the Taikorea Hall Society arranged for a new Roll of Honour board to replace the one listing the names of the WWII men, and also to record the names on the marble plaques on the WWI memorial. This was then hung in the hall.¹⁶

However, before long the old Taikorea hall was also sold for relocation to the marae at Rangiotu; and its former site was also to be disposed of.¹⁷

Discussion within the community then focused on what to do with the war memorial plaque from inside the hall, and with the war memorial column itself. It was felt that the plaque should go to the Te Kawau Memorial Recreation Centre, in Rongotea - where it now is.¹⁸ Suggestions during 2008 included installing the war memorial column on the highest place in the vicinity of Taikorea, with a fence around it so that it looked nice when old residents visited the district. Alternatively, it was thought that it should go to the Rongotea Cemetery. Discussion also revolved around who would pay for this work and then, after the Douglas Square site was proposed, whether it was appropriate to have two war memorials (Rongotea's own, and Taikorea's) in the same location. It was also noted that Chris Hehir, who had moved the memorial twice before, still had the planks needed for the relocation, and that he also had some of the plaques from it for safe-keeping.¹⁹

Finally the decision was made to move the memorial to the north-eastern quadrant of Douglas Square, in Rongotea. Gary Barnett of Feilding was given the task of moving it, along with constructing the new base and installing the plaques. The actual shift occurred on 27 March 2009.²⁰

¹⁰ *Manawatu Standard*, 20 February 2015, p. 4: 'Taikorea memorial to stay in Rongotea'

¹¹ Olsen & Doyle, p. 61

¹² This information kindly provided by former Taikorea School pupils Anna MacDonald, Ethne Maher and Kirsty Johnston, via Facebook, on December 4th & 5th, 2017

¹³ Remai Hehir (ed.), *Taikorea 1888-1988* (Palmerston North, 1988), p. 5

¹⁴ *Manawatu Standard*, 21 May 2007, p. 4: 'Derelict school a hole in family memories'

¹⁵ The plans for this extension are dated May 1952. 'Taikorea Hall – War Memorial Wing, 1952', Ref: MDC Plan 2438, Archives Central, Feilding. Also: MDC Hall file: 'Taikorea Hall' ("Was file 9/2013, Now 9/2026")

¹⁶ Hehir, p. 42-43

¹⁷ *Manawatu Standard*, 31 January 2009, 'Marae set to buy hall for \$1': <http://www.stuff.co.nz/manawatu-standard/news/327471/Marae-set-to-buy-hall-for-1>; *Manawatu Standard*, 1 June 2011, 'Old hall a new wharekai', <http://www.stuff.co.nz/manawatu-standard/news/5084299/Old-hall-a-new-wharekai>

¹⁸ Manawatu District Council Hall file: 'Taikorea Hall' ("Was file 9/2013, Now 9/2026"); Doyle & Olsen, p. 62

¹⁹ Manawatu District Council Hall file: 'Taikorea Hall' ("Was file 9/2013, Now 9/2026")

²⁰ Olsen & Doyle, p. 61

Rongotea History

More than 150 people attended the memorial's rededication in Rongotea on 20 February 2010. The NZ Defence Force formed an honour guard around the memorial for the event. The rededication was performed by Padre Chris Purdle from Linton Camp, before those present moved on to the Te Kawau Memorial Recreation Centre where the Taikorea Honours Board was now installed. The war memorial also now had an extra plaque that read: "*Originally erected at Taikorea, resited March 2009 after the closure of the School and Hall.*"²¹

In 2013, Peter Olsen, a retired farmer from Colyton, began a mission to restore over sixty of Manawatu's war memorials prior to the 2015 centenary of the Gallipoli landings. He found that of the 16 granite and marble monuments in the district, only two were in disrepair. These were the ones at Taikorea (sic) and Cheltenham. Olsen stated that: "*They had no reinforcement, the ground had subsided, cracks were forming in the foundations, and they needed a helping hand from the council.*"²²

Peter Olsen was also working on a "*glossy coffee table book*" on the history of the memorials in the district, and wanted to source flagpoles for each monument for the centenary celebrations.²³ Co-compiled with Janet Doyle, this research became the book *Communities Remember World War One: Memorials of the Manawatu District*, which was published in 2014.

Not everyone had been happy at having the memorial relocated from its original home. In February 2015, two Manawatu District Councillors voted against a proposal to leave the memorial at Rongotea, instead of returning it to Taikorea. The argument given was that there was now no visual reminder that Taikorea ever existed, and that it had in fact been a thriving community until the school and the hall had closed. The Rongotea RSA had also objected to the memorial having been removed from Taikorea. However, the majority of the District Councillors voted for it to remain in Rongotea.²⁴

In early 2015, the war memorial underwent an overhaul, and the four original upper segments were installed on a much sturdier new mount sited alongside where it had stood since 2009.²⁵ The plaque that had been unveiled in 2010, was also replaced with a black granite one that had the same wording.

The photos of the memorial reveal that during its various relocation, the plaques were not remounted as the designers had originally intended – although the re-sitings may have created various reasons for this. The top four segments are the originals, but below that the concrete bases have differed. The bottom of the four original segments has weathered badly on one face, with its wording "Duty Nobly Done" now being very indistinct.

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

The memorial comprises an obelisk of granite with a chamfered, stepped basalt plinth and a concrete base. A marble plaque on the base has states "the names of the mean at the foot hereof made the supreme sacrifice in the defence of King and Empire, As men they lived, As men they died". Seven names are noted below the inscription while another marble plaque on the opposite

²¹ Vera Hunt, *Campbelltown Rongotea* (Palmerston North, 2011), p. 285

²² *Manawatu Standard*, 29 May 2012. [Note that the base had included reinforcing, as recorded in the MDC file: 'Taikorea Hall' ("Was file 9/2013, Now 9/2026")]

²³ *Manawatu Standard*, 29 May 2012

²⁴ *Manawatu Standard*, 20 February 2015, p. 4: 'Taikorea memorial to stay in Rongotea'

²⁵ Refer to the Google Street View photo of the war memorial in Douglas Square, which was photographed in April 2015, with the outline of the former mount side still visible alongside it.

face notes the another 19 names. “Duty nobly done” is inscribed on the basalt plinth, while on the shaft of the obelisk is written “Lest we forget, This monument was erected by the Taikorea Settlers in honour of the boys who left this district to fight in the Great European War 1914-1918”. A further marble plaque read “Originally erected at Taikoea resited March 2009 after the closure of the school and hall”.

The obelisk form originated in Egypt where it was considered to be a ray of sunlight made solid and that God existed within the structure. The word obelisk is Greek meaning a prong for roasting and indicated protection, defence and stability. With about one third of all WWI memorials based on the obelisk design, it was the most common design. Cenotaphs, gates and arches were the next most common. A number of memorials included marble human figures while domed cupolas and crosses were rare²⁶.

The memorial is located on the north east quadrant of Douglas Square, opposite the Douglas Square war memorial on the north west quadrant in the centre of Rongotea. The site is grassed with flower beds in the south east corner, trees lining the northern perimeter and several seats facing in towards the memorial. Mersey and Thames Streets divide the square equally into four quadrants with a roundabout at its centre.

SUMMARY OF HERITAGE VALUES

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

The memorial has **moderate architectural** and **technological** values as a good example of an obelisk-styled war memorial using common materials, style and symbolism of the period.

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

The memorial has **moderate authenticity** as it has been relocated twice prior to its installation on its current site.

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

SOURCES

Printed Sources

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

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²⁶ <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/memorials-and-monuments/page-4>

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Online Sources

Auckland War Memorial Museum: Online Cenotaph: <http://www.aucklandmuseum.com/war-memorial/online-cenotaph> (Search the various servicemen's names)

Auckland War Memorial Museum: Drawing of Taikorea Hall and WWII memorial wing
http://www.aucklandmuseum.com/collection/object/am_library-paintinganddrawings-56

Google Street View <https://www.google.co.nz/maps/> (as per captions and footnotes)

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Other Sources

Manawatu District Council Hall file: 'Taikorea Hall' ("Was file 9/2013, Now 9/2026")

Manawatu District Council: 'Taikorea Hall – War Memorial Wing, 1952', Ref: MDC Plan 2438, Archives Central, Feilding

Also: Former Taikorea School pupils Anna MacDonald, Ethne Maher and Kirsty Johnston, via Facebook, on December 4th & 5th, 2017

IMAGES



Figure 1: An undated view of the lower portion of the Taikorea War Memorial, as pictured in Peter Olsen and Janet Doyle's book *Communities Remember World War One* (p. 61). Taikorea Road is in the background. The memorial's mount looks rather scuffed and damaged, and presumably the photo was taken not long before its 1980 relocation. The second photo (taken on 2 December 2017)

shows the corner of the former Lyons farm, where the memorial originally stood on the corner of Taikorea Road (at left) and Couper Road.

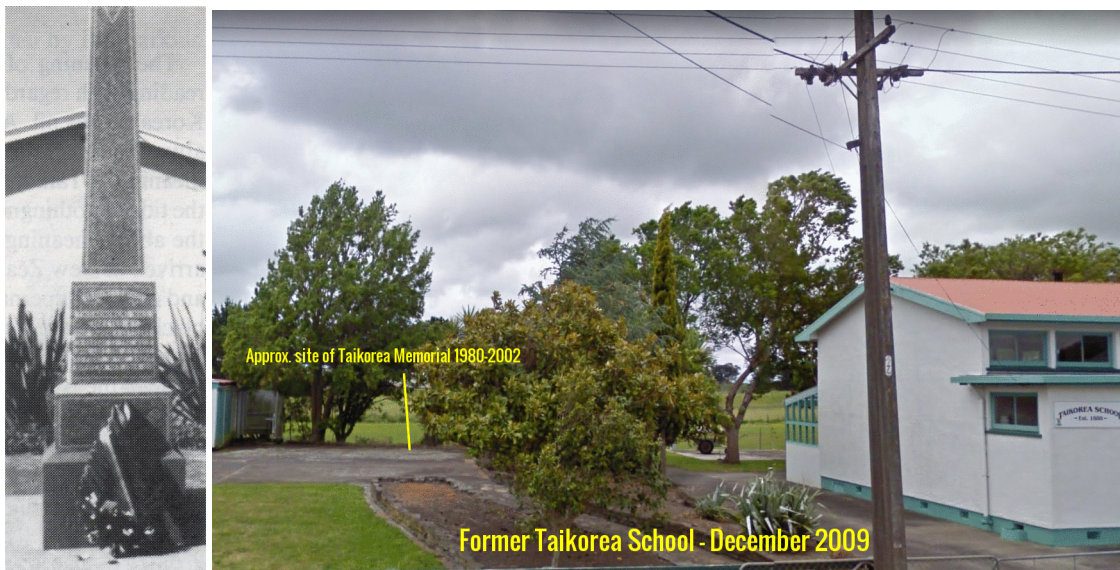


Figure 2: The Taikorea War Memorial shown while at the Taikorea School site, from the book *Taikorea, 1888-1988* (p. 5). Possibly the photo was taken during the school's Centennial celebrations which took place between April 22nd and 24th, 1988, where a wreath was laid at it. Also shown is a Google Street View photo of the former Taikorea School, with the approximate location of the memorial shown. The memorial was relocated to alongside the Taikorea Coronation Hall after the school closed in 2001.



Figure 3: The Taikorea Coronation Hall with the war memorial and a flagpole alongside it – photographed by Google Street View in April 2008, eleven months before the memorial was relocated to Rongotea.



Figure 4: This Google Street View image of Douglas Square, Rongotea, was taken in April 2015. It shows the monument on its new foundation, while the remains of its previous site are visible at left.

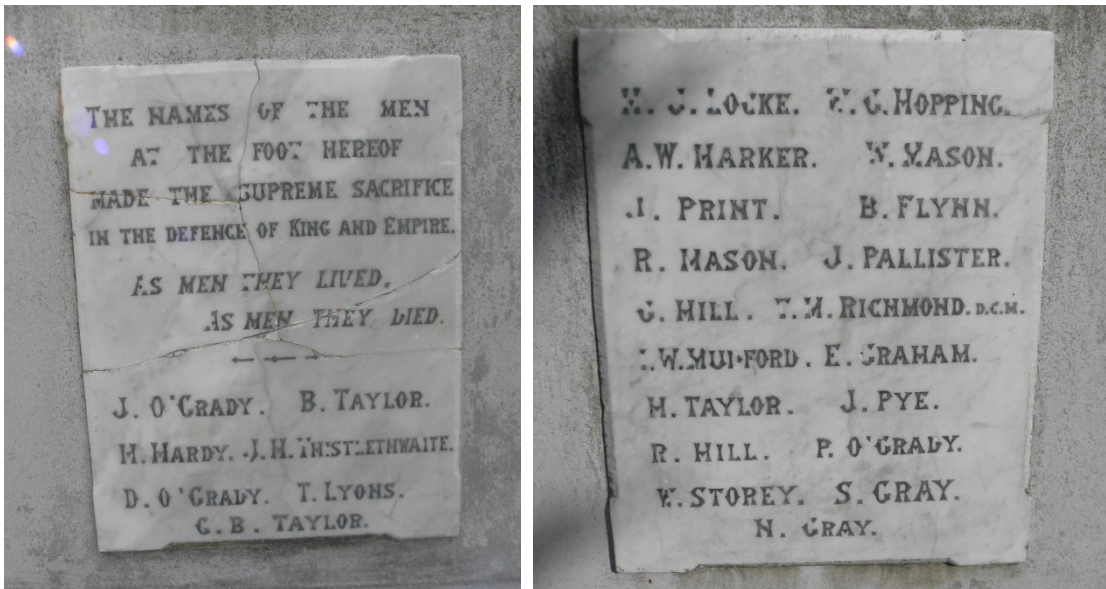


Figure 5: Twenty-six servicemen were named on the original plaques that were installed on the memorial in 1920, including seven killed. The local history books on Taikorea published in 1958 and 1988, increased the total number of men who served in WWI to 34, including 10 who died. A further 20 served in WWII, of whom two were killed. J.H. Thistlewaite's name was spelt correctly in the 1958 book.