

Devonport Field of Remembrance – Research + Community Involvement

If you are new to the research game, a good place to start is the advice contained on the NZ History website at <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/researching-first-world-war-soldiers>. It provides some simple tips and links to other resources.

Sadly, even with the best of intentions and the research skills of several people and institutions, there will be dead ends, even after travelling less-used resources that require much persistence such as Births, Deaths & Marriages (<https://www.bdmonline.dia.govt.nz/>). Your local genealogical society or organisation may also be able to help, but don't neglect enquiring of that second cousin you have not seen for years or the uncle that lives overseas.

A useful record is the books by Grant Tobin called *We Will Remember Them* which contains details of every World War One casualty and a photograph of their individual headstone or inscription. The first volume covers Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany while the second covers France and Switzerland. It contains GPS details of each cemetery, so will aid anyone touring the battlefields. The website www.nzef-ww1.com has further details.

Why is research important? Apart from getting the record straight and perhaps clearing up some old myths and misconceptions, understanding who the individuals were is much more than just acknowledging the name chiselled on a monument somewhere. If we simply re-record the list of names that already exist we have achieved nothing. Creating a Field of Remembrance needs to be about developing new stories, particularly by the young.

The involvement of the schools in our area is a fundamental part of our vision for community involvement in our Field. We want to use the opportunity of the broad focus over the next five years to stimulate them to look at those young men, who were part of their same community 100 years ago, with a fresh approach to discovering who they were, what they did in their schooldays, who they married, where they lived, and their part in the conflict. It is the new stories and images of life that will endure for the next centennial, just as the stone grey memorials and rolls of honour have been the record for last 100 years. We have alerted all the schools in our area of the existence of the Field and suggested some projects they may wish to adopt in 2014 and beyond. We have offered to support their school projects with speakers, organising a Tell Me a Story competition for Year 5/6 pupils (Primary) and Year 7/8 pupils (Intermediate), providing totara trees to establish living memorials, etc.

We have not yet achieved one of our goals of establishing an ad hoc community group of local historians, teachers, conservators, military, council workers, etc. We envisage a cross-section of the community that can discuss issues of how various strands of remembrance can be integrated into a whole that allows everyone in the community to feel part of the activity. The Field of Remembrance may be a focal point, but our goal is to use it to provide the impetus for greater community cohesiveness and improved relationships and resilience.