

The Concept

The Hall, and its style, was the vision of Frank Milner who, even before the Great War, had expressed the hope that Waitaki would have a magnificent Assembly Hall which would follow the style of similar buildings attached to the great public schools of England. The sacrifice of many Old Boys in the Great War of 1914-18 led the Rector, and the many persons linked with the School, to believe that the Hall would be a fitting memorial.

From 1920 a committee advanced the project and appeals for money were launched. The editor of *The Waitakian* spoke for many when he urged full support, saying:

"It is with pride and a sense of duty that we offer our whole-hearted support to the Old Boys" Association in its resolution to perpetuate the memory of Waitakians who paid the supreme sacrifice in the recent war. The spirit which actuated the promoters of a permanent memorial must have a wide appeal, and in its worthiness is assured success. A record of wonderful achievement has been capped by victory, and an example of unselfish devotion to duty crowned with the unpurchasable gem of sacrifice. On the playing fields of our secondary schools many of these great men learned to "set the game before the prize", and, in keeping their memories ever green, a fine inspiration is provided for that younger generation who are about to receive the rich heritage their predecessors died for."

The Foundation Stone

Soon after his return from a visit to England, J. M. Forrester, architect to the Waitaki High School Board, produced a design which was influenced greatly by examples of halls he had inspected while in the Mother Country. The Governor-General, Viscount (later Earl) Jellicoe, who took a great interest in Waitaki, laid the foundation stone in 1923. This was the tangible start, although many problems remained to be overcome.



The Building

Difficulty was encountered in securing Oamaru stone of the finest quality with the consequence that work was suspended for several years. The builders were D. Sinclair and later Winsley Brothers, and the stone work was carried out by A. Smith. The cost soared from £6,000 (\$12,000) to £17,000 (\$34,000), the latter figure including the pipe organ. This amount was raised by the Old Boys, the School pupils of the period, and the High School Board. Their effort was assisted by a Government subsidy. Masters and boys of the time record their admiration for the skilled tradesman who worked in a small shelter for about three years engaged in the meticulous task of carving the complex stone and wood ornamentation.



With the passage of time the white stone has become grey, the roof slates are no longer

blue, but the School, and North Otago, still has a building which is unique. The twin towers of the frontage, the beauty of the Oregon ceiling, the great stained glass window which catches the passing sunlight, the many and unusual decorations in stone and wood, and the proportions of windows and vestibule, make this a magnificent building. The boys still sit on the original, uncomfortably hard, backless forms; to many Old Boys this was part of the training of a Waitakian. Since 1927 the boys have respected the Hall which has had a profound influence on them and the School.

The Opening

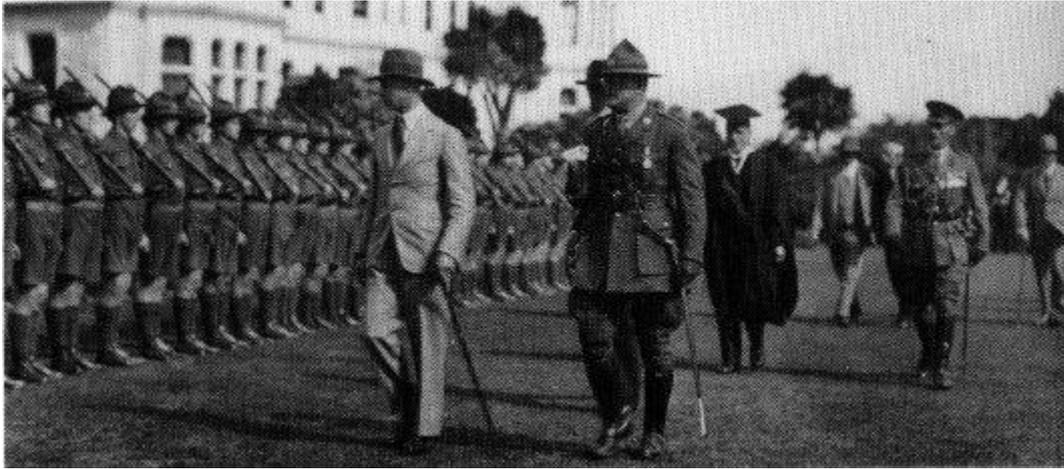
16 March 1927, was probably the most important day in the history of the School.

After a frantic last-minute rush all was ready for the official opening of the Hall by His Royal Highness the Duke of York, who was later to become King George VI. The royal train stopped at the School railway crossing where the Duke was received by the members of the Board of Governors and the Rector. The Duke walked through the front garden and inspected the Guard of Honour and the Military Band. After a brief inspection of the south wing he was escorted across the quadrangle to the entrance to the Hall of Memories. The Duke formally opened the great doors with a golden key presented to him by the architect, Mr J. M. Forrester. In the Hall, the Chairman of the Board, Mr B. P. Lee, welcomed His Royal Highness.

The Duke replied as follows:

"Mr. Chairman and boys of the Waitaki High School, I want to thank you very much for the welcome given me to-day. I am very glad to have the opportunity of visiting the School, for I have heard a lot about it from my brother, who, as you know, visited here in 1920. I am going to say very little, because a Hall of Memories requires few words. Its association and all it stands for cause silence rather than speech. But I do ask you not to let those words "Hall of Memories" become merely an empty name to you. Remember that this Hall stands for all that was best and noblest in those who gave their lives for the Empire to which you and I belong. Remember the self-sacrifice of those Old Boys and see to it that the generation to come after you will also learn the lesson they taught. For as they served in war, so do you serve in peace, and you will be completing the task they began. Cherish the ideals of truth and right, and their lives will not have been given in vain. I have much pleasure in declaring the Hall open."

The Duke then unveiled the impressive stained-glass window on the east side of the building. The Rev. W. MacLean gave the prayer of dedication, and the Rector, on behalf of the School, thanked the Duke. Kipling's "Song of the Children" and the hymn "For all the Saints" were sung during the ceremony. Outside the Hall the royal visitor planted a tree in the quadrangle, and the party left for Oamaru in a procession of motor-cars. In the evening a service of commemoration was held in the Hall.



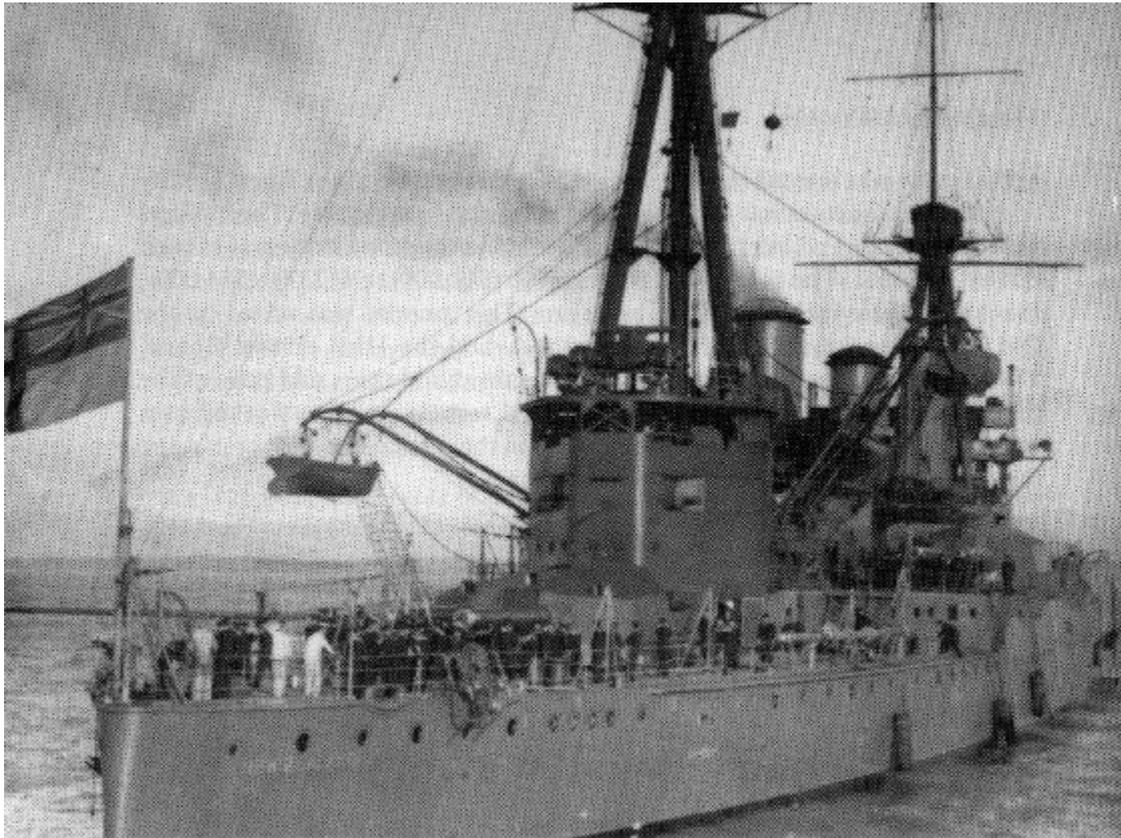
Old Boys who were present at the opening of the Hall were impressed by the visit of the Duke, but they particularly remember the massive preparations. Nearly everything that could be painted was painted, roofs, rafters, the entire fence as far as the north road; windows were cleaned, every weed was pulled out, and the grass cut to perfection. Two arches adorned with greenery and bearing signs of welcome were built, one between the railway line and the gates, and the other in front of the south wing. The Guard of Honour was drilled strenuously by Major McCulloch, and the result was a fine display. The Rector himself made sure that all boys stood firm during the singing of the National Anthem.





The Interior

Of great interest are the interior furnishings and the flag collection. Teak, from the Great War battle-cruisers *New Zealand* and *Powerful*, was used to make the platform furniture. In the vestibule is the School Crest; beside it is the ship's bell of H.M.S. *Ajax*, a battleship which took part in the Battle of Jutland. Inside the Hall, plaques record the names of Waitakians who served in the Armed Forces in two World Wars. With the help of his many influential contacts abroad, Frank Milner created a display of flags which includes battle ensigns and the personal pennants of commanding officers. Many facets of life of the Empire and in particular the services of the Royal Navy in protecting its widespread territories, are commemorated by many colourful flags. Since the days of World War II flags have been presented on behalf of the New Zealand Armed Forces, by the Waitangi Trust Board, and a United Nations flag flown on a plebiscite mission was presented by a member of the School staff.



The Events

Inevitably the Hall has had extremely varied use. The most important almost daily event has been, and still is, the School Assembly, which since 1931 has been accompanied by the magnificent pipe organ. From 1932 Anzac Day services were held in the Hall, and for many years the boarders' Sunday evening chapel took place there also. In Frank Milner's closing years as Rector ceremonies were held to mark such anniversaries as Empire and St George's Day, the Coronation of 1937 and other events of Imperial significance.

The extracts from *The Waitakian* which follow record events having an association with the Hall of Memories:

"An interesting ceremony took place on the afternoon of Saturday, April 14, when the Canadian flag which hung on the Cenotaph at Toronto was handed over to the School by the Prime Minister of New Zealand (the Rt. Hon. G. W. Forbes)."

"A notable gift which has been recently received is the historic Red Ensign flown by H.M.S. New Zealand at the Battle of Dogger Bank on January 24th, 1915. The donor is Sir Dudley North, now First Sea Lord. The fact that a Red Ensign was flown was due to the fact that at the Battle of the Bight in the preceding August some confusion had been caused by a superficial similarity between the British and the German naval ensigns. After the war, Sir Dudley was accustomed to fly the flag at his home in Hampshire on the anniversary of the battle. His decision to present it to Waitaki was made in 1937, and he entrusted it to Captain Parry of the "Achilles" to deliver to the School. Captain Parry intended to make the presentation in person but was unable to visit the School before the declaration of war. As a result the flag accompanied him on the "Achilles" when he left

the Dominion on service and so was on board that vessel when she shared in the glories of the River Plate action."

"Early in the second term we celebrated United Nations" Flag Day in the Hall of Memories, when five of the best speakers in the School gave addresses centring around the flags of the four principal Powers of the United Nations: British Empire, United States of America, Russia and China."

"Rear Admiral R. E. Washbourne, C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E., Chief of the New Zealand Naval Staff, presented to Waitaki Boys' High School a White Ensign from H.M.N.Z.S. Otago. The Ensign will hang in the Hall of Memories. In a brief address to the boys of the School, Admiral Washbourne traced the history of "flags at sea", with special reference to the origin of the famous White Ensign."

"A memorial service was held in the Hall of Memories on Friday, 12th February, in remembrance of the late Sir Winston Churchill. During the impressive ceremony the Rector spoke briefly about Churchill's life and the School listened to a recording of Churchill's most famous speeches. L. A. McIntyre read a passage from the Bible and A. J. Geare read a poem about Churchill. The School's singing of the hymn "Fight the Good Fight" and the "23rd Psalm" further heightened this impressive ceremony. The service closed with the playing of the Last Post and Reveille by D. Richardson and D. Naylor and the singing of the National Anthem."

"At a special assembly in the Hall of Memories on Thursday, November 4th, a Waitangi Flag was presented to the School. The flag was presented by a member of the Waitangi National Trust Board, Mr. H. H. Parata, and he told the School that Waitaki was probably the first boys' secondary school in the country to receive a New Zealand flag which had flown over Waitangi House, one of two such flags which has flown over the Treaty House for the past year."

The Hall has been a notable force and example to successive generations of boys; Waitakians of Frank Milner's era will remember his oratory, including the ability to ad lib, and to turn to his advantage a setback in the proceedings. Many distinguished visitors have been received in the Hall. Those who have addressed the School, either at Morning Assembly, Anzac Day, or the end of year prize-giving ceremony, have included Governors-General, Prime Ministers, Cabinet Ministers, businessmen, churchmen and sportsmen. Unusual callers have included a group of Red Indians and an expert in karate.

The Music

Numerous bands have played in the Hall; of recent years these include the New Zealand Army Band, the Singapore National Youth Band, an Australian School Band and the Roslyn Mills Band. Many organ recitals and musical functions have been presented. For ten years L. H. Goddard played a weekly lunch hour organ recital. In the more recent period D. C. Childs and R. H. Nelson gave many recitals and organised musical evenings.

The staff responsible for music in the Hall have been:

George E. Wilkinson 1925-36
M. A. Fastier 1936-40
L. H. Goddard 1940-53
I. le C. Harvey 1953-55
A. W. Gibb 1936-70
C. G. H. Oliver 1956-63
R. H. Nelson 1960-73 and 1979-81
D. C. Childs 1969-73 and 1976
J. W. Bates 1974-77
D.C. Bell 1972-85
S.M.Hinds 1987-91 and 1993-
A.L. Berry 1992



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