



## New Zealand Memorial



The 10 equally sized 10" diameter heavy signal weights were salvaged from Kew and left over from our new signalling installation. They have been illustrated by pupils from Bere Alston Primary School in a special art class to show their interpretation of the flora, fauna and traditions of New Zealand. They are to be incorporated in the "Pathway to paradise" area between the station platform and the new memorial shelter at the station. Is it a mere coincidence that 10 were surplus, or was it pre-destined?

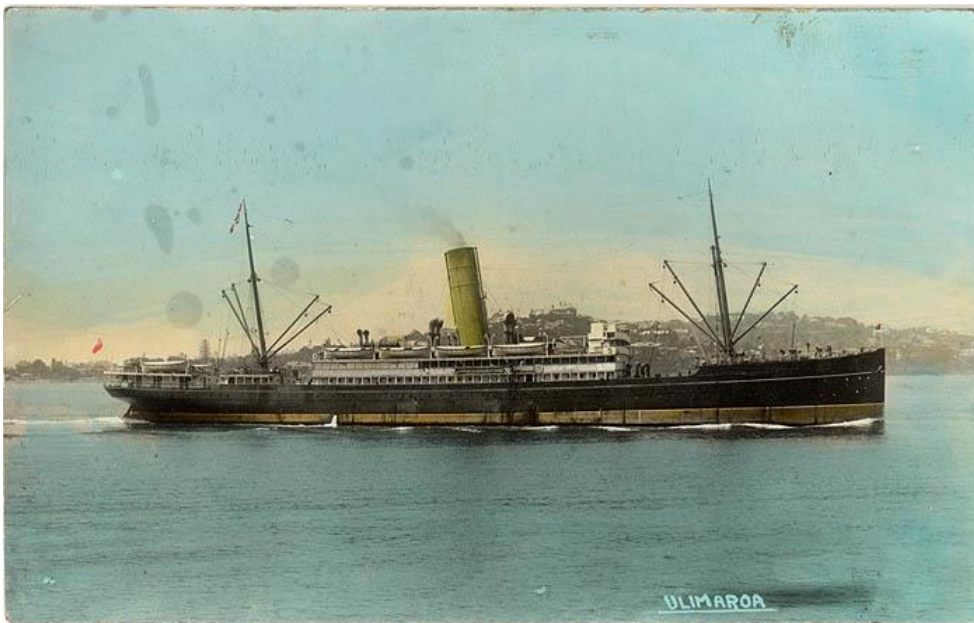
We look forward to the children seeing the results of their handiwork.

The anniversary of the disaster will be commemorated on September 24<sup>th</sup> at 3.30pm.

## The Railway Accident at Bere Ferrers, September 24th, 1917 and its Plymouth connections

At dawn on September 24th 1917, keen observers might have noted a vaguely familiar small passenger ship in the crowded waters of Plymouth Sound. She was adorned with wartime camouflage, a wisp of smoke drifting from her single tall funnel — perhaps the last of her coal after a long ocean voyage. The ship was the *Ulimaroa*, far from her usual passenger trade across the Tasman Sea. Commandeered for duty as a troop ship, this was her third visit to Plymouth from New Zealand. This time she had brought the 28th Reinforcements from Wellington to support the war effort in Europe, following in the path of many other such arrivals. Although it had gained some autonomy, the bonds between New Zealand and its distant 'mother country' were strong, and thousands volunteered (or perhaps were 'persuaded') to sign up in support of Britain's war effort. With casualties rising remorselessly through 1916 as the war ground on at the Western Front, huge numbers of extra men were drafted in from across the Empire. Until mid-1916, most New Zealand servicemen had been sent to the Middle East, including to the notorious disaster of Gallipoli. Then the focus switched to Europe, with the '13th Reinforcements' arriving in Plymouth on 26th July 1916.

After two months at sea, the troops on the must have gazed with relief, excitement and nervous anticipation at the silver-grey town before them, ringed by the green hills of Devon and Cornwall. They had arrived. They would have known they faced yet another day's travel - by train - to the main New Zealand training camp at Sling, near Bulford in Wiltshire. As this destination lay not far beyond Salisbury, they and their kit were eventually crammed aboard a long troop-train operated by the London and South Western Railway (LSWR). While it is unclear where in Plymouth the 28<sup>th</sup> reinforcements landed, or where they boarded their train (Friary? Devonport Kings Road? Stonehouse Ocean Terminal?), it is known that the men had not been fed since early morning. Although there is controversy about the exact instructions, they were given the impression that at the 'first stop', men would be detailed to collect rations from a van at the rear of the train.



The troops finally set off up the LSWR main line towards Exeter via Okehampton. However, at Bere Ferrers, progress was halted by a signal at danger, probably due to a train in front making slow progress up the incline to Bere Alston. Only some of the sixteen coaches were alongside the station platform; the remainder were beyond its southern end. As soon as the train stopped, some of the hungry troops evidently decided that they had reached the much-anticipated first stop, with its promise of 'tucker'.

Doors opened and men jumped down onto the track, ready to collect rations, But almost immediately disaster struck. The afternoon express to Plymouth from London Waterloo sped southbound round the curve. At the last moment, fireman Charles Thorne shouted to his driver and sounded the engine whistle. There was a frantic scramble on the track — but nine men were cut down, and a tenth died of his injuries in Tavistock Hospital.

As elsewhere in Britain, the rural tranquillity of Bere Ferrers had only been disturbed by the all-too frequent news of casualties and in the fears and imaginations of those left behind. But in those few fateful seconds, violent death was hurled right onto the community's doorstep. For the station staff, villagers who rushed to the scene as news spread (including the rector, Reverend James Shame) and also the hundreds of troops still aboard the troop train, the sight must have been horrific. The London express came to a halt several hundred yards down the line and was then allowed to proceed to Friary station in Plymouth, so its passengers were spared the grim outcome, as described in New Zealand newspapers, for example, the *Ashburton Guardian* (Canterbury, N.Z.) of 29<sup>th</sup> November 1917:

"As one man who helped to remove the bodies said," the men were knocked down, like ninepins... If; there was one cause for thankfulness, it was that the men who were killed suffered no pain. In every case death must have been instantaneous. The bodies were mutilated beyond recognition, and but for the men's identification discs it would have been impossible to ascertain who they were. It's surprising to me that more men were not killed. Some of them just managed to jump clear, and that was all."

The soldiers who died, all riflemen (privates) of the 28th Reinforcements, New Zealand Expeditionary Force, were the following:

William Gillenders, 36, sheep farmer of Darfield near Christchurch  
 William Frederick Greaves, 31, farm hand of Paraparaumu, north of Wellington, North Island  
 John Stanley Jackson, 20, coppersmith of Featherston, Wairarapa, north east of Wellington,  
 Joseph Judge, labourer, age unknown, who had emigrated from Accrington, Lancashire  
 Chudleigh Inwood Kirton, 21, farmer of New Plymouth  
 Baron Archibald Wilson McBryde, 24, labourer of Dunedin  
 Richard Vincent McKenna, 20, farmer of Pahiatua, north of Wellington. North Island but born in Australia  
 William John Trussell, 28, cabinet-maker of Wanganui East, North Island  
 John Warden, 33, farmer, originally from Randalstown, County Antrim, Ireland  
 Sidney Ennis West, 21, farm hand of Sentry Hill, near New Plymouth

It is rather poignant that two of the soldiers who had passed through Plymouth that morning were from New Plymouth, in the Taranaki region of North Island. The town had been settled by the Plymouth Company of New Zealand in the 1840s, and still maintains fascinating traces of its roots. Many streets bear names with 'Old Plymouth' and Devon connections, such as St.Aubyn St, Molesworth St, Breakwater Road and Woolcombe Terrace.

## New Zealand Army Expeditionary Force Reinforcements, 28th

### THOSE KILLED AT BERE FERRERS RAILWAY STATION

GILLANDERS	William Simon	Rifleman	55050	36 years
GREAVES	William Frederick	Rifleman	57068	31 years
JACKSON	John Stanley	Private	55753	20 years
JUDGE	Joseph	Rifleman	56791	
KIRTON	Chudleigh Inwood	Rifleman	56795	21 years
McBRYDE	Baron Archibald Wilson	Private	55776	24 years
McKENNA	Richard Vincent	Rifleman	57122	20 years
TRUSSELL	William John	Rifleman	56874	28 years
WARDEN	John	Rifleman	56883	33 years
WEST	Sidney Ennis	Private	54624	21 years

### THOSE INJURED AT BERE FERRERS RAILWAY STATION

BARNES	Robert James	Rifleman	55026
GATLEY	Nathaniel Johnston	Private	56920

The ten victims of the accident were buried in Efford Cemetery. Again, the New Zealand newspapers of the time carried news of this event (sent of course, by the cable connection to Australasia that existed by the time of the First World War). Wellington's Evening Post described the funeral thus, drawing in part on the Western Daily Mercury:

"The funeral took place at the Corporation Cemetery at Eggbuckland, near the Stoke Military Hospital, at Plymouth, and was one of the most impressive scenes witnessed there during the war. Thousands of persons gathered in the vicinity, and at the cemetery the crowd was so dense that the gates had to be closed.

"Many women were in black... and not a few betrayed deep emotion during the final rites at the graveside. Each man was buried in a separate grave, and there were three religious ceremonies. Four of the victims belonged to the Church of England, four to the Presbyterian, and two to the Roman Catholic Church. On the plate of each coffin were engraved the name of the man, his regimental number, and the date of his death. The ages could not be ascertained, while the unidentified soldier was described as "Private Unknown." [He was later identified as Sidney West] "On each coffin was placed a wreath, from the headquarters of the New Zealand Reserve Group. The sisters at Stoke Military Hospital also sent a wreath. "The funeral procession was headed by a gun-carriage, on which the body of one man rested. The gun-carriage was drawn by a pair of handsome jet black horses. The other nine bodies were conveyed in Red Cross motor ambulances, driven by women of the Army Service Corps, each coffin, being enveloped in a Union Jack,"

"The principal mourners were a party of twenty men of the New Zealand Army Service Corps, in charge of an NCO. Mourning parties were also sent by the Royal Artillery, the Royal Engineers and the Somerset Light Infantry. The Devonshire Regiment provided the band and the firing party, "The men of the Church of England were buried first, the service being conducted by the Rev. C. W. Jacob, Chaplain at the Military Hospital, Stoke. The

Presbyterian service, at which the Rev. J. Grierson officiated, came next, and then the Roman Catholic, which was taken part in by the Right Rev. Monsignor Provost Barry, the Rev. Father M. L. Morrissey, and the Rev. Salvator van Huffel (a Belgian priest), Over each grave three volleys were fired, followed by the sounding of the "last Post" by buglers of the Devons."

As with the other 328 military graves of the First World War at Efford, the resting places of the ten New Zealanders who died at Bere Ferrers are still well-maintained. Eight are marked by pale stone Commonwealth War Graves headstones, adorned with the 'silver fern' emblem of New Zealand. William Greaves lies in a grave with a stone surround, and William Gillanders is commemorated by a more ornate brown headstone, evidently paid for by Mary Ann, the wife he had recently married in Christchurch.

Within a few weeks, an inquest into the accident was held at Bere Ferrers station, conducted by Robinson Reid, the coroner for Devon, and chaired by the local rector, the Reverend Sharpe. In what must have been a tense and dramatic atmosphere, various witnesses were called, including railway staff and military personnel. The final verdict was 'accidental death'. The military authorities appear to have been keen to suggest that the soldiers had disobeyed order by alighting from the train. However, other witnesses hinted that there was a fair degree of confusion about where the soldiers would be able to receive their food (was it the 'first stop' or 'Exeter?'). It was also very apparent that the men had been hungry for far too long.

While the details of the inquest are not recorded in this article, it provided some fascinating 'connections'. For example,



Private Archibald Porteous described how two of his fellow soldiers jumped down onto the track at Bere Ferrers and were cut down. Yet Archibald himself not only survived the war and returned to New Zealand, but went on to live to be over 100 years old. In contrast was the fate of Brigadier-General Harry Fulton, the most senior New Zealand officer at the inquest, who stressed that the soldiers had acted 'unlawfully'. Following an illustrious military career, he was temporarily in charge of the New Zealanders' Sling Camp in Wiltshire. However, not long after the accident he returned to active service in Flanders, only to be killed the day after his arrival when his headquarters was shelled.

The accident inevitably left a deep impression on the villagers of Bere Ferrers. A memorial service was held in St. Andrews church, and funds were raised for a memorial in the chancel. The brass tablet was unveiled in October 1918 by the Bishop of Exeter, Lord William Cecil, who had himself lost three sons in the war. Bere Ferrers was also visited by New Zealand military representatives, who presented a New Zealand flag to hang by the memorial in the church. They also brought their official photographer, Thomas Frederick Scales. Several of the photographs of Bere Ferrers he took in 1918 are accessible online from the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington (<http://natlib.govt.nz/>). Especially poignant is an image of a lone New Zealand soldier, in his characteristic 'lemon squeezer' hat, gazing from the platform at Bere Ferrers station towards the site of the accident.

In recent decades, Bere Ferrers villagers and the local branch of the British Legion have reinforced their collective memory of what happened on September 24<sup>th</sup>, 1917. The names of the ten dead soldiers have been added to the war memorials in both Bere Ferrers and Bere Alston, and they are remembered at the annual Armistice Day service. The accident has also been commemorated by signs, interpretation and a rose garden at Bere Ferrers station, courtesy of Chris Groves, who runs the 'Tamar Belle' railway heritage site at the station.

The centenary of the accident is to be commemorated on September 24<sup>th</sup> 2017, spearheaded by the British Legion and supported by local organisations and individuals, including Bere Alston Primary School and 'Tamar Belle'. Events include a special service in St. Andrews church, as well as ceremonies and additional memorials at the station (which is of course, still very much in business on the Tamar Valley Line), Representatives from New Zealand have been invited, and other contacts made with New Zealand, see for example:

[www.stuff.co.nz/taranaki-dailynews/news/94575433/plymouthtown-searching-for-soldiers-families-100-years-on-from-tragic-accident](http://www.stuff.co.nz/taranaki-dailynews/news/94575433/plymouthtown-searching-for-soldiers-families-100-years-on-from-tragic-accident)

Although this tragic event took place in Bere Ferrers, the links with Plymouth itself are significant. The New Zealanders who died were just ten of the many thousands of troops who stepped ashore from ships that had made the long trip to Plymouth Sound. They boarded their train at a Plymouth station, and Plymouth was the destination of the express that cut them down. Now they lie, still remembered, up on the ridge at Efford cemetery. Hopefully the city can reinforce its important links with New Zealand in the future, not least with the city of New Plymouth, which deserves a presence in the new History Centre, as a vital part of 'global Plymouth'. And ten New Zealand infantrymen, fresh from the Ulimaroa, are part of the story.

*Clive Charlton*

## That Faithful Day 24<sup>th</sup> September 2017

Whilst historical records will generally provide an insight into the facts appertaining to past events it rarely dots the i's and crosses the t's on everything and therefore by its nature the full facts can only sometimes be completed by conjecture.

The non-availability of any records of the full facts of the Bere Ferrers railway accident therefore prompted me to undertake a little such conjecture from the scant evidence actually available on timings, train formation and any outside factors which may have contributed to the halting of the special troop train for Bulford Wiltshire on that fateful day at the contemporary recorded time of 03.51 to 3.53pm.

It is not recorded at which docks in Plymouth the New Zealanders laboriously came ashore by transfer tender from their ships although this could have been Sutton Harbour, Millbay, Stonehouse Pool or even the Naval Dockyard or indeed any combination of all four. They would most likely have then rendezvoused at one of the stations which for convenience would most likely have been the LSWR Friary Terminus although the LSWR through station at Devonport had an assembly area specifically for the marshalling of troops adjacent to the London bound platform.

The train with a reputed length of 13-16 coaches would have required two tender locomotives to haul it and the carriages would almost certainly be expected to be compartment stock without corridors between vehicles at that period in time. Once they had boarded the train communication with the troops on board would have been difficult other than by an officer walking along outside to bark instructions.

Upon departure the locomotive crews would have been working hard to build the fire for the climb all the way up to Okehampton. Upon arrival at Bere Ferrers with the distant signal set at caution the driver would be slowing the train in anticipation of the expected stop board aspect of the platform starter. He would probably have halted the engine opposite to the signalbox so he could converse above the noise of the locomotives (which at this stage would have been blowing off with excess steam) with the signalman as to the cause of delay without having to alight and the combination of stopping position and short platform would mean only perhaps the first two carriages of the train would have been platformed. This would explain why the troops alighted on to the adjacent down line as with the up line approach on the top of a steep embankment alighting on the platform side would not have been an option! Considering the circumstances it is surprising that more soldiers were not killed or injured although we have no evidence as to how many actually alighted and were able for example to jump out of the way of the express or flatten themselves between

the rails as the train rushed by.

Turning to the train timings we have been unable to find any information and the nearest LSWR timetable I have for the first world war period is 7th June to 30th September 1914. This indicates the average time for down line stopping services from Tavistock to Bere Ferrers as 17-20 minutes including a stop at Bere Alston. The "Plymouth Express" (10.50/11.00am departure from Waterloo) was timed to leave Tavistock at 3.18/3.26pm and run non stop to Devonport arriving 3.40/3.48pm. Passing time for Bere Ferrers would therefore be expected around 3.31/3.39pm allowing for a gain of 5 mins in omitting the Bere Alston stop.

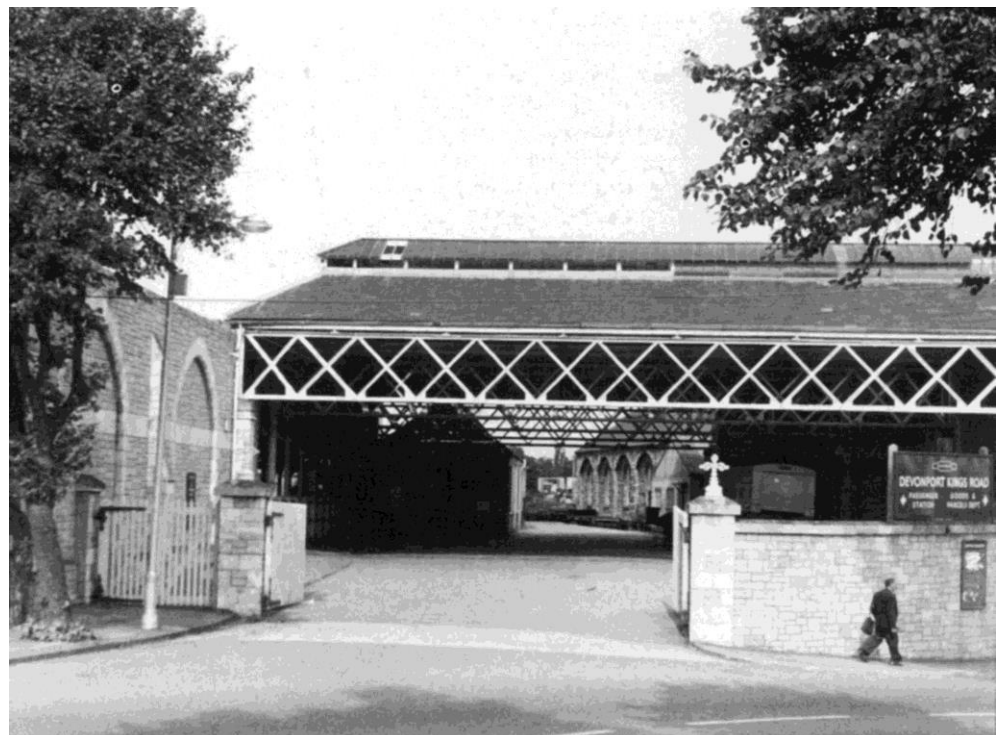


The up train preceding the troop special was scheduled to depart Plymouth Friary at 2.40pm and after calling at all stations: Mutley, North Road, Devonport, Ford, St Budeaux & Tamerton Foliot was due to arrive Bere Ferrers 3.16pm and in proceeding to Exeter, Queen Street should have reached Brentor at 3.51 pm. It can only be assumed the late running of this service was the reason for the unscheduled stop of the special at Bere Ferrers because reputedly the preceding service had not cleared the Block Section on to Bere Alston. This is the nearest & most logical assessment I am able to make of the events. If the down express "struck" at 3.51pm it must have either been running late or the timetables may have been slackened by 1917 due to the intensity of war traffic and

it may have been on time (note the incidence of may!) If any readers have access to or records of a 1917 LSWR timetable I would be very interested to hear as this could provide additional insight?

PS recent research has revealed the signalman on duty at Bere Ferrers on that fateful day was Frank Kidwell, who must have carried a heavy heart in having obeyed his instrumentation not to clear the signal which lead to the accident.

The covered way (cab yard) at Devonport LSWR Station reputedly used for the assembly of servicemen awaiting transport. The 28<sup>th</sup> Reinforcements NZEF and NZRB would most likely have marched here after disembarkation by tender from the troop ships 'Waitemata' and 'Ulimaroa' moored in Plymouth Sound. Ships registration of the time seems to indicate troops coming ashore either at Devonport (Naval base) or at Plymouth (Millbay Docks). On 24<sup>th</sup> September 1917 landings were recorded at Plymouth with a total of 2,178 troops arriving. This uncovers another





previously unrecorded aspect as such numbers would have required at least 2 trains 2 trains. Could it therefore have transpired that the stop at Bere Ferrers was due to a previous troop special departure occupying the block section ahead?



An internal view of the covered way which adjoined the up London platform. Previously until the opening of the new line from Lydford to Devonport in 1890 when the station was a terminus. Departures for London would have left from what later became the down platform which contained the usual extensive terminal facilities to be expected from a principal station. The timber buildings shown, therefore were probably additions from 1890 when the station became a through route and were a far cry from the quality limestone architectural standards of the main structure

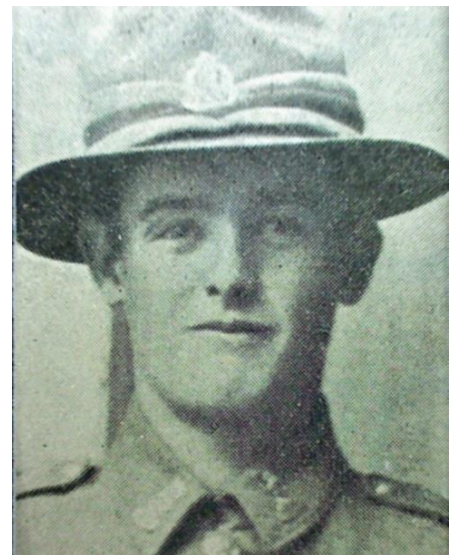
*Chris Grove*



*William Simon Gillanders*



*John Stanley Jackson*



*Sidney Ennis West*



The beautiful painting of Bere Ferrers Station which features on the front cover depicts the station as it was on 24<sup>th</sup> Sep 1917. It was specially commissioned by our group from local artist Ian Pethers and is now available from Tamar Productions, Booking Hall, Bere Ferrers as a -

Post Card for 50p.

Or as a Notelet Card for £1

(please add 60p per order for P&P Cheques to 'Tamar Productions')



## Memorial plaques

"Who shall sing the song of them,  
The wonder and the strength of them,  
The gaiety and tenderness they bore  
across the sea?

In every heart's the song of them,  
The debt that England owes to them,  
The chivalry and fearlessness  
That strove and won her free."

This shows the two memorial plaques accompanying the New Zealanders memorial which had deteriorated to the point of being unreadable as a result of being horizontally positioned adjacent to the name tablet of those killed.

New versions have therefore been made by Parc Signs and these will now be positioned on angled podium stands beneath the memorial shelter which should effect some future protection from the weather.

This memorial rose garden is in remembrance of the ten soldiers of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force of the 28th Reinforcement's who had boarded a troop train for Sling Camp on Salisbury Plain after disembarking from the troopships Ulimarua and Norman in Plymouth Sound on 24th September 1917.

Some men had been designated to collect refreshments at their first scheduled stop, Exeter, and not knowing the country, when an unscheduled signaling stop was made here, alighted on to the tracks and were struck by the express from Waterloo to Plymouth.

Memorial provided by Royal British Legion local and Devon branches and Tamar Belle Heritage.