

Of passing interest

Historic features in our landscape observed by the director of Puke Ariki **Kelvin Day.**

Waitara Military Cemetery

On the southern side of Waitara's McLean St, between Browne and Cracroft Sts, can be found a small cemetery with a central black granite obelisk. This is the final resting place for a number of the military who were killed in the Waitara area during the First Taranaki War 1860-61.

The site of the cemetery is about 200m south of where Camp Waitara was established on what is now the southern part of Pukekohe Domain. The cemetery is on a mound that was said to have been surrounded by low, swampy terrain in the 1800s. The monument, erected by the New Zealand Government in 1915, records the Imperial military casualties of the 40th Regiment from two major engagements, that at Puketakauere on June 27, 1860 and Kairau on December 29, 1860.

Puketakauere was a major defeat for the military with 30 killed and another 34 injured during the encounter with Maori forces. Lieutenant Charles Francis Brooke



has a separate grave nearby, probably due to his officer status and his position as Aide-de-Camp to Major General Sir Thomas Pratt. Brooke's sword was retrieved from the battlefield by Maori and was given to historian W H Skinner at Purangi years later. Skinner later

deposited it at Taranaki Museum. About 1909 the Waitara Military Cemetery was vested in the Waitara Borough Council and at that time it was described as being covered in rubbish.

The cemetery was tidied up and the monument erected six years

later so that these men were not forgotten. Within Taranaki there were eight military cemeteries from Patea in the south to Waitara. In some instances the bodies have been reinterred in other burial grounds while the exact location of the Patea military cemetery is still debated.