

Speech for Tokanui Memorial

E h nga mana eh nga reo rau rangatira ma
Tena kotou katoa.

Thank you for the invitation to participate in today's formal ceremony and on behalf of Council and the community a huge congratulations to all those involved in creating this fitting memorial to remember those that are buried here.

There are a number of people and organisations that I would particularly like to thank for making this day possible:

- Ngati Maniapoto
- Maurice Zinsli and family for the initial research and publicity that stimulated the community conscience that something was not morally right.
- Te Awamutu RSA and Terry Findlay
- Mark Reinsfield and the Tokanui Cemetery Committee for putting into action steps to permanently recognise those buried here.
- James R Hill Funeral Home for funding this magnificent memorial.
- Geoffrey Sowman Blenheim Stonemason for design and creation
- Anna Purgar for the genealogical research.
- Bowers Concrete, Jeremy Walker Concrete Laying and volunteers
- NDA Engineering for Flagpole
- Department of Conservation - Mike Paviour
- Ministry of Health

I find this an incredibly moving and sombre occasion. This Cemetery in my mind is similar to the many war graves around the world and indeed contains a number of service men and women. The reason for this comment is that normally a cemetery is a reflection of the community and contains the remains of many people who have lived full and happy lives. Granted a number have not achieved their "3 score years and 10" due to ill health or accidents but this is unfortunately just a fact of life.

In this case all who are buried here did not have the ability to achieve their full potential and, as with the war graves full of young men and women struck down in their prime, these graves contain people who through no fault of their own were unable to live full and happy lives within the community.

When I reflect back, over even my lifetime, with the improvements in the treatment of mental health and changes in community attitude towards mental illness I suspect that today a large number of these people would not in fact have needed to be institutionalised. Shellshock, getting pregnant out of wedlock or being just a troublesome teenager were all reasons for being committed to a mental health institution and treatments such as electric shock treatment and unnecessary brain surgery were all parts of treatment that horrify us today.

Changes in attitude and improved medications now mean a much larger group of people can live in the community and those changes have ultimately led to the closure of Tokanui Hospital, some 18 years ago, and a number of similar institutions around the country.

We have an obligation as a civilised country to remember and pay respect to those buried here as it is an absolute human right to be acknowledged and remembered. Today must be bitter sweet for the families and friends of all these people.

Today we pay that respect to their memory, and derive inspiration from those people who suffered a psychiatric occurrence and died in Tokanui Hospital. The unveiling of this stunning memorial isn't just for those buried here but an acknowledgement of all those who have suffered from or worked with those who have a mental illness.

My thanks go out to all of you for making the effort to being here today to remember whanau and friends, to celebrate their lives, both ups and downs, and I do hope this provides some sense of peace for you all. May the spirits of those buried here also find peace in today. You have been named, acknowledged as people who lived and remembered forever in this wall.

No reira
Tena kotou tena kotou tena kotou katoa.