



Tracked down: Hawke's Bay archivist Ralene Mabin shows Bob Heale a plaque at Hereworth School erected in honour of his uncle who died in WWI – one of four Heale brothers to go to the war. Bob and his family had no idea the plaque existed until Ralene tracked him down after a seven-year search.

Memorial raises family emotions

A family that sent four brothers to World War I was unaware they had a personal memorial in Havelock North until a 75-year-old archivist tracked them down after a seven-year search.

Ralene Mabin, of Waipukurau, first came across the Heale name when she became the archivist for Hereworth School in 2002.

Descendants of the brothers, two of whom died in the war, saw the gate that bears their name at the Havelock North school, formerly called Heretaunga School, for the first time just before Anzac Day.

About 10 family members from Auckland, Taumarunui and Christchurch attended a small ceremony.

The son of one of the brothers, Bob Heale, 80, said it was an emotional occasion.

Mr Heale, who 10 years ago visited Gallipoli and the Western Front, where his father served, said he was pleased his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren had found this long lost link.

"That war had a huge impact on my family, which would have been much bigger without it. Mind you I've done my best," said the father of seven, with a chuckle.

Shortly after Mrs Mabin started the voluntary role as the school archivist she came across a dusty box of tarnished badges and medals and a photo of a man named Walter Heale.

"It was quite fascinating what this young man had achieved at the school in terms of athletics. I was very interested," Mrs Mabin recalled.

Later she noticed the name Heale on a plaque at the school gates.

She found out the gates had been donated to the school by Walter's

mother, May Strachan, after he was killed at Gallipoli in 1915 at the age of 22. He was one of 33 former pupils killed in the Great War.

She later discovered a second Heale, George, was listed on the school's memorial board. He was killed on the Somme at the age of 26.

Mrs Mabin wanted to tell the Heale family about her discovered treasures but couldn't find any descendants.

"I'm not too au fait with the internet so I searched through all the major phone books but had no joy. I assumed the name must have died out with the two men," she said.

"My husband [Barrie] and I do a lot of travelling around the country and I was always on the look out for the name but never came across it".

Finally, last year when at her grandson's graduation at Lincoln University, she saw the Heale name in a list of graduates.

The university refused to give the man's contact details but suggested she look in the Bay of Plenty area. A few phone calls later Mrs Mabin was speaking to Bob Heale, the son of an Alfred Heale, who it transpired was a brother of George and Walter.

Bob told Mrs Mabin a fourth brother, Arthur, also went to the war as a doctor. He survived the war and served in World War II, but died in England in 1946 at the age of 59, probably an after-effect of malnutrition on Malta during the blockade.

Alfred was badly injured in the war but lived to 104. He died in 1989.

"He didn't talk about the war much. You'd get something out of him occasionally, but not very much," Bob said.

"The war has a hell of a devastating effect on families," he said.