

# Prayer and heartbreak

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The story of a chapel, built to ease the heartbreak of losing a beloved son in World War I, is also the story of a community coming together to pray, reflect and give thanks.

The church in question is St George's Chapel in Matapiro Road, Crownthorpe.

Turning off the Napier-Taihape Road at Pukehamoamo School, the road winds gently upwards through lush farms where fat lambs and lumbering bulls graze and grapevines stretch out in golden rows.

Opposite Matapiro Olives, sits St George's chapel.

On this sunny autumn afternoon, what good timing to be at the chapel at the same time as Nola McAulay (nee Treseder) and her family who had gathered for a family memoriam.

I was able to unlock the door and let them in to see the chapel, refurbished in 2010 and there on the wall, a framed newspaper cutting of Nola's writing of the same family I had come to find more about.

James Henry Coleman, born in the

village of Crownthorpe in Norfolk, England, emigrated to New Zealand in 1859 at the age of 26.

He managed Te Aute Estate before buying 9500 acres [3844.5 hectares] at Longlands Estate near Hastings. He farmed here, invested in land – some of it in Central Hawke's Bay – and in 1878, retired to Napier, due to ill health.

A shrewd businessman, he made sound investments in business and land and was actively involved in local politics, clubs and societies including the Hawke's Bay Club and Agricultural and Pastoral Society. He also donated a ward – Coleman Ward – to Napier Hospital.

At age 45, he met and married Hannah Watt, the widow of James Watt who he'd sold the Longlands block to in 1872.

Hannah already had a son and two daughters and together they had a daughter and two sons, one of whom was Herbert Napier Coleman, who the chapel was eventually built for.

The family lived in James Watt's old home, Waititirau, which was in its day considered one of Napier's great homes.

Herbert Coleman was keen to fol-



**Community chapel:** St George's Chapel is a wonderful reflection of community spirit.

low in his father's footsteps and started his farming career on several Central Hawke's Bay properties.

While shepherding on Te Aute Estate, he met Blanche Swinburn and they married

on a sunny summer's day in January, 1910 at the Anglican Church in Te Aute.

In 1911 James Coleman bought 3107 acres [1257 hectares] at Whakamarumaru, and Herbert and Blanche moved into a new

homestead on the property.

Their oldest child, Helen, was born in 1911, followed two years later by James then Peter and Lloyd.

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# Chapel of remembrance endures

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The Colemans enjoyed a busy rural life and photographs show the family with their nannies and the children learning to ride horses at an early age.

With war raging in Europe, thousands of Anzac troops joined up to give their support. Herbert must have felt duty-bound to join their ranks in spite of the fact he was more than 30 years of age and had the responsibility of a young family of four children. He left New Zealand shores on August 1917 and was killed on April 13, 1918. He is buried in a village in Englebelmer, France.

Herbert's death left his widow, Blanche, with four young children to look after. The eldest, Helen was only six years old.

James Coleman was also devastated by Herbert's death and his way of keeping his son's memory alive was to create the chapel. Built in 1921, it had the classic design of an English village church.

When the war ended in 1918, the Government requisitioned land for the returned servicemen. Crownthorpe Station was one such property, so Blanche and her family moved to "Hillington" in Havelock North, where she brought up the family alone. She became interested in the Red Cross and was patron of the Havelock branch. She died in 1954.

Of Herbert's four children, Helen never married, James studied economics and law at Cambridge and then farmed at Waipukurau. Peter farmed near



**Window of memory:** The middle stained glass window, bears Hannah Coleman's name.

Orange, New South Wales, Australia and the youngest, Lloyd, also went to Cambridge and studied law. However, war intervened and he joined the RAF as a bomber pilot. He received the DFC and bar and later, was killed on active service.

Once again, the family experienced tragedy through war.

St George's Chapel was consecrated in April 1923, gifted to the Diocese of Waiapu in 1924 and over the years has been home to regular services for both Anglican and Presbyterian churchgoers.

The historic chapel weathered the 1931 earthquake with minor damage to the original Norman-type tower. This was replaced by a steeple in 1949.

Last year, a more thorough restoration project was completed and celebrated by this tiny rural

community. The church bell, which had stood silent for many years, rang out with pride to a full house.

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