

AUCKLAND GRAMMAR SCHOOL

30th December 2025



When I started writing **THE TWENTY THREE**, my research initially took approximately 12 months. Thinking that I was 'done', I continued more and more research over the next two years until finally the book was complete. During that time of research, I discovered where these 23 brave young New Zealand aviators buried in Stonefall Cemetery attended school in New Zealand.

One of the schools with which I was in touch, was Auckland Grammar School at Epsom, attended by former student **FREDERICK WATSON RITCHIE**. Peter Stanes, who is the Archivist and Historian at Auckland Grammar School was extremely helpful and, once he knew that I would be in Auckland, invited myself and Richard to see where Fred studied and how Auckland Grammar School remember and commemorate their 'old boys' lost in both World Wars



Built on a hill overlooking the motorway into the city centre, the Grammar school was established in 1869. Both a boarding and day school for boys, the school's motto is "Per Angusta Ad Augusta" which means..."Through hardship to glory." This state school suffered 'old boy' losses in both world wars. In World War I, the school lost 309 'old boys' and masters. In World War II, there were 400 'old boys' who never came home from the war. A memorial to the fallen is erected at the school.



Fred served in the Royal New Zealand Air Force in World War II as a Wireless Operator and Air Gunner. Born on the 16th September 1922 in Te Aroha, Fred loved rugby, cricket and yachting. On leaving school he worked as a Clerk for Dalgety & Co in Auckland until he was called to serve.



Fred trained in New Zealand, Canada and the UK before he joined the Air Sea Rescue with RAF 279 Squadron based in Thornaby. On board the Vickers Warwick airplane that crashed near Dinsdale in County Durham during a training exercise, were ROBERT WOOLFIELD and DESMOND HOLLAND, two Kiwi mates with whom he'd trained in England. Fred died on the 7th January 1945 when a 'dummy' attack by two Hurricanes was made on the Warwick. The inexperienced pilot reacted excessively, the Warwick stalled and crashed.

Frederick Ritchie was 22 years old when he died, just four months before the end of the war in Europe. His name appears on one of the roles of honour on the walls that surround the Memorial at the school.



After taking us around the memorial and seeing Fred's name on one of the panels, Peter gave us a tour of what was the original 1931 library building. No longer used as a library, this is now the Heritage Room that features wall panels to display the early history of the school, together with its archives. Our tour finished in the main hall, stunning in itself and a true reflection of the school's history.



My utmost thanks goes to Peter and Auckland Grammar School for their kind hospitality. Having visited, I also felt a little closer to Fred Ritchie, especially when Peter said when we were in the library... "He most certainly would have walked in around in this library".

Peter Stanes has written two Roll of Honour books that outline in detail those 'old boys' lost in both World Wars and their service to New Zealand. He gave me a signed copy of the World War II book containing Frederick's service with the RNZAF. **Thanks Peter.**