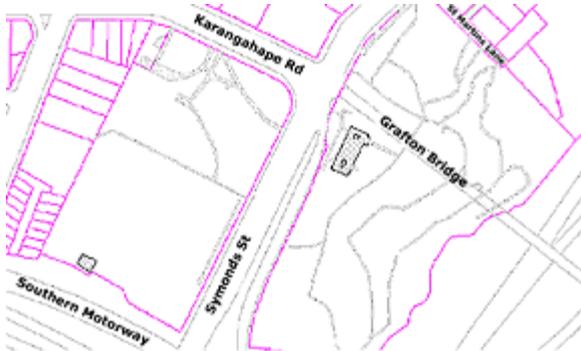


History of the Symonds Street Cemetery in Auckland

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Introduction

From early pakeha settlement in Auckland until the end of 1909, Symonds Street cemetery was administered as five separate cemeteries with five separate boards of trustees. Now it is under the unitary control of Auckland City Council.

The Anglican cemetery

The Anglican, or Episcopalian, or Church of England, cemetery was formed from Crown Grants to Bishop Selwyn dated 12 July 1841 and 4 November 1843. Bishop Selwyn confirmed "the Governor, on my application has vested in me as trustee two pieces of ground of eight acres each, for the burial of the dead according to the usage of the Church of England, allotting at the same time, two similar plots to be divided among the other denominations of Christians. Our burial grounds are about half a mile from the centre of the town, on the sides of two of the ridges which slope down gradually to the harbour". It was formally consecrated on Sunday 24 July 1842. Of the nineteen hundred people living in Auckland in 1842 no less than eleven hundred classified themselves as Anglicans.

The Jewish, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic cemeteries

The one-acre Jewish, or Hebrew, cemetery was formed from a Crown Grant dated 24 November 1843, while the five acres Catholic cemetery passed to Bishop Pompallier on 16 September 1852. A contemporary account of the cemeteries confirms "the present Episcopalian burying ground was at one time common, and intended for all the inhabitants, and used by all the inhabitants as a burying ground; that after being so used, it was during the time of the late Governor Hobson, made over to the Church of England and consecrated by the Bishop. The ground on the opposite side of the road was allotted to the Roman Catholics; some of the Presbyterians were displeased with the ground allotted to them, perhaps they did not like the situation ... they had a quarrel with the Surveyor General; the Presbyterians were in consequence for a time without any place to bury their dead". The three acres Presbyterian cemetery was formally confirmed by a Crown Grant dated 8 April 1869, while the three acres Wesleyan cemetery was not vested until 11 May 1872.

Despite the above official dates, the different denominations were using their respective areas from at least 1848. Auckland internments were described as "[although] liberal in their religious ideas, yet we find the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the Wesleyans, the Jews and the Roman Catholics, have each their separate cemeteries... the Church of England has the largest graveyard, picturesquely situated in a ravine. On the opposite side of the public road, unenclosed with about twenty wooden tombstones, if I may use the term, stand the cemetery of the Scotch and the Wesleyans, close to the last, but carefully enclosed, is that of the Jews; a short distance apart from all, is the resting place of the Roman Catholics, distinguished from the other by a large wooden cross".



The Wesleyan cemetery

The Wesleyan cemetery was first used when James Martin Buller, the sixteen year old son of the Reverend James Buller, was "the first laid to rest in what is now known as the General Cemetery", Buller died on 15 September 1852. Earlier in the year the five cemeteries had been described as the "Church of England, (that generally used by Presbyterians Wesleyans etc, Roman Catholic and Jew ... [and] a section adjoining the Church of England cemetery which has been reserved to be given as a general burying ground".

By 1864, "the English cemetery is on the side of a hill, and the Roman Catholic cemetery on the top of the same hill. The high road runs between them, and there is but a low hedge of loose stones between the dead and the busy noisy thoroughfare of public traffic. The English part lies on the left (east) hand: it has no walks or plantations, no flowers or shrubs that I could see on or around any of the graves. The stones, for the most part plain as plain could be, with wooden palings around them, and very close together. I saw but very few with neat iron railings, one very fanciful; the best I observed were those of officers or their wives, recently buried there. It is of very great extent, and the greater part of it much crowded. I was surprised to see no chapel there. The Roman Catholic division was much in the same style, with very little attempt at taste or ornament; but it has the advantage in point of situation, being higher, drier, and more cheerful looking than the English side, not so much overgrown with the rank weeds, heath, and fern that give so wretched and forlorn a look to the other one. It is also more extensive and the graves not so closely patched together. I saw no chapel here either, but a large roughly made, white wooden cross stands high surmounting everything else ... next to the Roman Catholic, comes the Jew's burying ground, but I did not go into that. I could see that it was in the same style, and as bad or worse than the others. The stones, if there were any, hidden by high thick gorse and heath".

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre was built on Symonds Street, just to the South of the Anglican cemetery, and was opened by Bishop Selwyn on 27 August 1865. Not consecrated, this acted as a mortuary chapel for Anglicans, while the Catholic Saint Francis de Salles mortuary chapel opened in 1866, at the corner of Symonds Street and East Street.

Regulation of Burials

By the 1870s, the need for some form of control of the cemeteries had become apparent. The Wesleyan cemetery had grown particularly, being "the general cemetery ... which is principally used by the Wesleyan, Methodist, Congregational and Baptist denominations (as well as by those of no creed at all). From 1876, this was known as the Auckland Public Cemetery, and by 1883, there had been around six hundred burials there.

Also of note was the poor condition of the walls, fences, footpaths and the graves themselves. The encroachments of the urban area continued, and from the 1860s the Auckland Provincial government and other authorities, received complaints concerning the need for another cemetery elsewhere, either on the isthmus, or even further out. In November 1871 central government passed an Act to Regulate Burials near the City of Auckland, for the protection of public health. This Act allowed the various boards of trustees to limit the numbers of burials. In 1874, an Act to Provide for Closing Certain Burial Grounds allowed for continued burials of blood relatives and a marriage partner of those already buried in a cemetery at the time of its closing.



An order in Council dated 1 September 1885, issued under section 73 of the 1882 Cemeteries Act, provided for the closure of the five cemeteries as from 3 March 1886. The Anglican cemetery had already imposed restrictions on burials from July 1878. Auckland City Council opened the Waikumete cemetery in west Auckland to take over as the main public cemetery in Auckland. Otahuhu Public Cemetery dates from 1880 and Waikaraka from 1890.

Proving eligibility for continued burials in the cemeteries was a problem. It was not until the 1882 Cemeteries Act that there was a legal requirement for keeping burial registration details, such as location and description of who was buried there. Around July 1887, the Anglican sexton created a list of those he believed were buried in the Anglican section. Percy Holt, variously described as an architect, surveyor, real estate agent and engineer, drew up a location map of some Anglican graves.

Burials continued in the cemeteries for the remainder of the nineteenth century, with the next major change coming with the construction of Grafton Bridge. The Auckland Cemetery Bridge and City Borrowing Act of 1905 granted the Auckland City Council the power to disinter graves that were in the way of construction. Legally the cemeteries were still the responsibility of the boards of trustees. Only eight remains needed to be re-interred in Waikumete cemetery, including two adults and one child by the name of Rhodes. The other remains were not identifiable.

The 1908 Auckland (Symonds Street) Cemeteries Act added a further limit on those eligible to be buried in the soon to be unified cemetery. As well as being a blood relative, or a marriage partner, those buried there after the end of 1909 had to be at least fifty years old. In 1908, the numbers of internments had included twenty Anglicans, twelve Presbyterians and two Non-conformists. Only the Presbyterians opposed the further limitations as their section still had unused plots. In addition, the Auckland City Council took control of the cemetery from the end of 1909, and erected an ornate stone arch entry to the Anglican section. It was removed as a safety hazard in 1968.

Maintenance and records of the cemetery

The now unified cemetery was remarkable for a lack of maintenance and records. The Auckland City Town Clerk reported "in only one case (Anglican) were records of any value available, and these were incomplete, so that some difficulty will be experienced in dealing with the future use of burial plots. Owing to the trustees having little or no income, the care of the cemeteries had somewhat degenerated, and the Council is faced with the necessity for a considerable expenditure". The City Treasurer further reported, "That he is unable to obtain either Block, Section, Number or other means of identifying internments in this cemetery and that the sexton states he has no records trusting to memory to open correct plots, declining all responsibility in the absence of proper plans and records". A newspaper at the time described the cemetery as "neglected, desolated and devastated".

A chapel was built in the Jewish cemetery, adjacent to Karangahape Road, in 1850. From the late 1930s, the Auckland Beth Israel Trust Board managed the Jewish section, and the Auckland City Council turned the remainder of the acre into a park. In 1954, the original timber Jewish chapel was replaced.

In 1959 the Auckland City Council Director of Parks and Reserves admitted "a perusal of the files from 1922 onwards gives evidence that maintenance has been kept to a bare minimum ... often the sexton was the only employee. Since 1945 Parks Department ... has been clearing away unwanted and broken concrete, portion of stonework, rotted wooden and rusted railings and placing as much of the area as possible in a condition where better maintenance can be achieved without increase in staff. Today the cemetery, having regard to its



topography and its difficult layout, is reasonably tidy, but the presence of neglected headstones leaves much to be desired". There were still one or two burials even in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

In 1958, Irene Broun and Zara Mettam recorded 1,479 inscriptions from every discernible tombstone, referring to 1,874 graves. This was collated by the Auckland Public Library and published by the New Zealand Society of Genealogists. In the 1960s, the extension of the southern motorway affected both the Anglican and Catholic sections. Two thirds of the Catholic section was removed, and a strip one thousand feet long and fifty feet wide removed from the Anglican section. From twelve hundred Anglican plots over two thousand actual graves were found and from around four hundred Catholic headstones over two thousand one hundred actual graves were found. Every effort was made to establish the identity of the remains but "the paucity of records and the great number of unmarked graves have been the main difficulties".

Memorials for those moved

In September 1969, a memorial was consecrated in the Anglican section, near the grave of Governor Hobson. Panels were inscribed with the names of those believed to have been moved from the Anglican section, cremated and returned to the cemetery. The remains were reburied underneath the panels. On the Catholic side a similar memorial was erected, with Catholic remains reburied under the plaques. The Auckland City Council now has a Conservation Plan operating for the cemetery.

Symonds Street Cemetery Index

A number of sources were used to compile the Symonds Street Cemetery Index. These include the late 1950s tombstone transcriptions, lists of Catholic and Anglican removed graves, the 1887 Holt map of Anglican graves, the Anglican St Paul's Symonds Street Cemetery burials 1841 - 1885, the early 1880s map of the Wesleyan section, photographs of remaining tombstones from the mid 1990s (you can purchase copies from the Library), the 1887 Anglican Sexton's list for the Anglican section, references from Auckland City Council correspondence, Little's funeral records May 1901 to December 1935 (available for consultation in the Special Collections section of the Library), the Suffrage Centennial Women's Register, and newspaper death notices (mainly the N.Z. Herald from 1886 to 1922 inclusive). These have been cross checked against the Catholic St. Benedict's and St. Patrick's church registers, and the Death Certificate index from the Registrar. The Jewish community have also assisted.

