

16. APPENDIX FIVE – ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE (KARORI)

The criteria used below to assess heritage significance are those employed by Wellington City Council in its 2001 Non-Residential Heritage Buildings Inventory.

Historic value

Is the place associated with important or representative aspects of national, regional or local history?

Karori Cemetery is undoubtedly one of the most significant historic places in Wellington and a nationally important historic place. As the location of nearly 80,000 graves and thousands of cremation repositories it constitutes the largest such cemetery in Wellington and one of the largest in New Zealand. Burying the dead, and other mortuary procedures, have a most important role in society and this activity, however prosaic, imbues a place like Karori Cemetery with great historic significance.

The cemetery is remarkable for the scope and accuracy of the information it contains. Through its written records and grave inscriptions, the cemetery offers social commentary on types of mortality e.g. infant and early deaths, accidents and epidemics. The types of monuments reveal much about taste, affluence (or otherwise) and the impact of a death on grieving relatives.

Is the place associated with events, people, groups of people or institutions which are of importance in national, regional or local history?

The graves and resting places of some of the most important New Zealanders of the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as the ordinary citizens of Wellington, are contained within the cemetery's boundaries. Among them are prime ministers, politicians, church and community leaders, prominent sportsmen and women, explorers, business leaders, civil servants and soldiers. The role that the Services Cemetery plays at Karori is one of its special features. But cemeteries are, to an extent, egalitarian places, in that the distinguished lie alongside thousands of people who never achieved prominence in society, but who lived lives of meaning and fulfilment.

Among the many graves are special monuments or places that commemorate events that shaped the lives of New Zealanders. The Tangiwai disaster of 1953 is remembered in the mass grave and monument constructed at the northern edge of the cemetery. Peter Fraser, a successful 20th century Prime Minister, has his own monument.

The special connection that churches and cultural groups have with cemeteries is expressed at Karori with the historic allocation of burial areas. Death has a significant role in religious ceremony and many of the tens of thousands of burials that took place at Karori were religiously based. In addition, specific plots were purchased for the burial of religious denominations.

Does the place have rarity value as a particular type of place or for its age or style?

Karori Cemetery is in some ways entirely typical of any cemetery of its kind in the country or even in the western world, but it is also unique, as a record of life and death in Wellington over a period of a century or more. The cemetery is a testament to the life experiences of generations of Wellingtonians. It contains the graves of a number of remarkable and surprising people and it is a special place for anyone with a passing knowledge of Wellington history and social life.

As time passes the cemetery will become even more significant. Already the form of graves, monuments and columbaria in use in modern cemeteries has changed. This kind of cemetery will not be constructed again. This will only enhance the rarity value of the cemetery and its individual features in the future.

Social value

Is the place held in high public esteem?

The cemetery is generally held in very high public esteem by most in the community as exemplified by the other social criteria below. The cemetery has come in for its fair share of criticism in the past, mainly for overgrown vegetation obscuring graves and paths, but the recent vigorous vegetation management programme has gone a long way to restoring public favour and support. This will only increase over time.

Does the place have high symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual or other cultural value for groups within the community?

Symbolic, commemorative and spiritual values of the Karori Cemetery are extraordinarily high, especially for those whose forebears are interred within its boundaries. Many families in Wellington, and well beyond, feel a special reverence for the place – many have taken part in the last rites of loved ones and friends in the Chapels or at the graveside, and many visit graves to reflect and remember. The presence of the Services Cemetery and Servicemen's Arch adds a war commemorative value to the cemetery. Distinct cultural and religious groups are acknowledged in different parts of the cemetery, often in a visually clear way because of different styles of burial.

Does the place have amenity value, either for its use, or for the role it plays in defining the identity of the community?

Amenity value is clearly evident in the way the cemetery is fulfilling its commemorative role. More particularly, services in the chapels, cremation and interment still take place in an environment that is entirely appropriate to this important social function. The cemetery also provides recreational opportunities for the community.

Aesthetic Value

Does the place have architectural or artistic value because of its design, form, scale, materials, colour, patina or quality of space?

The cemetery has very significant architectural and artistic values. These values reside in the individual components of the place – the graves, vaults and other funerary monuments, as well as in the buildings. There is a wide range of artistic expression in the graves, some of which exhibit very high levels of craftsmanship and design, not just in the special features of stone carvings but also in the lesser details of construction, finishing and inscriptions. The Chapel is an important architectural work, and is enhanced by stained glass windows that are of international interest. Taken as a whole, the cemetery is the repository of significant artistic achievement, stretching over more than a century, and it is a unique cultural artefact for this reason.

Is the place a good representative example of a particular style of architecture or period?

The cemetery includes representative examples of most styles and types of late 19th and 20th century graves and memorials. Amongst the buildings, the arts and crafts style of the early 20th century is well represented by the Chapel, and the modernist style by the Main Chapel. Vaults provide extremely interesting essays in the Classical and Gothic styles, and many graves exhibit details of these and other styles that repay detailed study.

Does the place have townscape value for the part it plays in defining a space or street, in providing visual interest, for its role as a landmark, or for the contribution it makes to the character and sense of place of Wellington?

Townscape values are evident in all parts of the cemetery, where a complex mix of built objects (buildings, graves, vaults, memorials, walls, paths and roads) and natural features (grass, trees, streams and natural landforms) provide vistas and views and juxtapositions of great visual interest. Here and there, landmarks in the form of obelisks or raised statues act as landmarks and visual reference points. The natural – albeit modified – environment is expressed principally through the stream corridor with its sinuous pattern, landform and indigenous vegetation.

Is the place part of a group of buildings, structures or sites that, taken together, have coherence because of their age, history, style, scale, materials or use?

Despite the huge diversity in the component parts of the cemetery, there is a visual coherence to the place because of its underlying purpose, the way in which all parts play a role in safeguarding and commemorating the lives of the past. There is a physical coherence in the materials, colours and textures of the built objects, and the soft landscaping plays a major role in tying the different parts of the place together.

Scientific Value

Does the place have a technical value in its structure, or for the choice or use of materials, or is it a good representative example of a particular building technique?

Technical values are evident in the structures in the cemetery, and in the range of materials that have gone into their making. Although the condition of some

structures is poor, the level of authenticity is high (see below) which enhances technical values.

Is the place authentic, retaining significant fabric from the time of its construction, or from latter periods when important additions or modifications were carried out?

The level of authenticity of the place is very high. This is partly because throughout its 110 year life, the cemetery has been subject to small scale change as the area covered with graves has expanded and facilities have grown to accommodate usage. There has been no ‘completed’ stage in the sense that a new building might be considered to be complete, but rather there has been a constant growth which only slowed when burials in new plots ended. This slow change is an important characteristic of the place.

Does the place have archaeological value for its ability to provide scientific information about past human activity or life style?

Karori Cemetery has considerable archaeological value. The changes through time in the physical fabric of graves, headstones, memorials and the cultural landscape provide evidence about past attitudes to death and changes in fashion and taste. Decorative elements provide information about symbolism and cultural beliefs and the analysis of materials used to construct graves can provide information about the role of personal choice and socio-economic status in funerary customs. The burials themselves also possess important archaeological values. Osteological studies of human remains can provide information about age at death, sex, ethnicity, nutritional and reproductive history, general health, disease and trauma. Cemeteries are a sensitive type of archaeological site, however, as their potential to provide valuable information about the health and composition of past populations needs to be placed within the wider context of their cultural value.

Note: The Karori Cemetery therefore meets all 13 criteria for inclusion in the Heritage Building Inventory.