

# 17. APPENDIX SIX – HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (KARORI)

## Origins and establishment

Karori Cemetery's establishment can be directly attributed to the understandable decision to locate New Zealand's first town cemeteries relatively close to populations. Bolton Street and Mount Street (Catholic) Cemeteries were both established within a short distance of the centre of Wellington in 1842, and by the 1880s both cemeteries were hopelessly overcrowded. With proximity to population and overcrowding, came fears of disease, particularly as both cemeteries were built on land that sloped down to the town and drainage was poor. Sanitation became an electoral issue as early as the 1850s and it only became more prominent as the century progressed.<sup>1</sup>

In 1882 the government passed the Cemeteries Act, which set regulations for the management of all cemeteries in New Zealand. One of its requirements was that an old cemetery could not close without a new site being opened. Conscious of public fears about the overcrowded cemeteries, the Wellington City Council, under whose jurisdiction the new cemetery was to be formed, began investigating new sites. The public also offered land to the Council, in many different, and in some cases outlying, locations. A site at Evans Bay was looked at, and farms were offered at Ohiro in 1882, Melrose in 1883, and at the city end of Karori.<sup>2</sup> The land in Karori was owned by James McKenzie, former surveyor-general and his brother Sir Thomas McKenzie, a former prime minister and high commissioner in London. A site at Crofton, owned in absentia by some local Maori, was also temporarily favoured.

The Council sought an opinion on soil types from Sir James Hector. Although he did not favour Karori, others did. One perceived benefit was that if a road could be formed from Polhill Gully, the proposed cemetery would then be equidistant from both ends of the town i.e. Thorndon and Te Aro. In 1889 the Council sought offers of land from Karori landowners. Again the McKenzies put forward their land and this time reduced their price from £70 to £55 an acre, which they were sure would comfortably beat the other offers the Council received.<sup>3</sup> By February 1890 the Council had chosen three sites for a ballot. Karori won the first vote, with seven, Khandallah four and Melrose one. In a succeeding ballot Karori was favoured nine to three over Khandallah.<sup>4</sup>

Following the vote, the Council attempted to settle terms with the McKenzie brothers. The Council was only prepared to offer £42 per acre and initially the

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<sup>1</sup> Alington M. 1978, *Unquiet Earth: A History of the Bolton Street Cemetery*, Wellington City Council / Ministry of Works and Development, Wellington p.77, pp.81-82

<sup>2</sup> Alington pp.85-88

<sup>3</sup> 00233:33:1889/?, James McKenzie to town clerk, 9 December 1889, WCC Archives

<sup>4</sup> Alington p.88

brothers turned it down, upset at the far lower offer.<sup>5</sup> When it was clear the Council would not budge, they reluctantly gave in.<sup>6</sup> Negotiations continued over other minor matters. It took nearly another year before the sale was finalised. In the meantime, under the Wellington City Empowering Act 1889, the Council raised a loan of £7500 (at 5%).

The Council considered the road a necessity if the cemetery was to be useful and therefore a cost to be borne as part of the work. Nevertheless it sought a contribution, from the McKenzies and, as the road would provide access to their properties, donations of land from affected landowners. The McKenzies stumped up £400 of their own money to augment the Council's £750, and work began in late 1890, after the consent of the various landowners was gained and the relevant conveyancing completed. It would seem that the Melrose Borough Council was also asked for a contribution but they declined.<sup>7</sup> The road was finished by the middle of the following year. Originally known, with some justification, as Cemetery Road, it was later renamed Raroa Road (meaning "sun all year" according to Irvine-Smith).<sup>8</sup>

In October 1890 the Council established a Cemeteries Committee, comprising the Mayor (ex officio), three councillors and one other. The land purchase finally went through in early 1891; it was described in council correspondence as 'recently purchased' in February that year.<sup>9</sup> The 95 acres of land cost £4,000.

However, the cemetery was close to not being established at all. Presumably as a response to the threat of disease, the Cemeteries Act also prevented the establishment of a new cemetery within the boundary of an existing city or borough. As the Karori Borough was not established until 1892, the land was still deemed to be 'rural' and the cemetery was established with only months to spare.<sup>10</sup>

The first burial at Karori was a month old infant who died on 3 August 1891. Margaret Alington, in 'Unquiet Earth', wrote of this first interment:

*In the midst of the vast acres of rough hillside, the ground was first broken to receive the tiny body of Frederick William Fish, a premature infant whose remains lay in isolation on the windy slopes for six months before the next burial.*<sup>11</sup>

There were two more infant burials before the new cemetery came into regular use early in 1892. For the preceding six months, available land at Bolton Street (and, remarkably, there was some) was used, there being little interest in the long trip to Karori if burials could continue to take place close to town.

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<sup>5</sup> 00233:22:1890/234, James McKenzie to town clerk WCC, 17 February 1890, WCC Archives

<sup>6</sup> 00233:27:1890/407, James McKenzie to town clerk, WCC 3 March 1890, WCC Archives

<sup>7</sup> 00233:34:1892/314, town clerk, Melrose Borough Council to town clerk, WCC, 2 March 1892, WCC Archives

<sup>8</sup> Irvine-Smith F.L. 1948, *The Streets of my City*, A.H and A.W. Reed, Wellington p.225

<sup>9</sup> 00233:30:1891/154, City Solicitor to town clerk, 5 February 1891, WCC Archives

<sup>10</sup> Section 74, Cemeteries Act, 1882

<sup>11</sup> Alington p.97

### The first decades

The various church burial grounds were consecrated and the first regular burials began in February 1892. The first Church of England burial was on 4 April 1892<sup>12</sup> and the first Catholic burial was five days later. The arrangement of the cemetery to a large extent mirrored that of Bolton Street, with the exception of the provision of an area for Catholic burials, previously provided for at Mount Street. A sexton, E. H. Nash, was appointed and for a number of years he shared staff with Bolton Street, which was still receiving interments in shared plots. The land not initially required for cemetery purposes was fenced off and leased for grazing.<sup>13</sup>

With burials shared between Bolton Street and Karori the increase in burials at Karori was incremental. The first interments were divided between public, Jewish, Roman Catholic and Church of England areas, all relatively close to the main entrance. As time went by, these areas filled and more of the McKenzies' former farm was brought into use. Between 1891 and 1896 there were 2,102 interments.

The first significant structure built at the cemetery was the sexton's cottage, an elegant villa with unusual, pointed arch windows, which sat on the site of the present cemetery office until the 1950s. The house was built in 1891 and was a familiar sight to mourners and visitors until it was replaced in the 1950s. It is presumed to have been designed by the city engineer or city surveyor, who also designed the cemetery shelter. Another important early structure built by the Council was a shelter for mourners, and it still stands. The proposal to build the shelter was debated by the Cemetery Committee in August 1891 but a decision was deferred. The City Surveyor, George Wiltshire (1846-1905), submitted a design for the building, and estimated the cost at £90 to £100. The lower of the two tender prices was £119.19.6, from S. Hemingway, and he was awarded the contract. Built for the use of all, it was described by the sexton as having a tower with louvres<sup>14</sup> and it came in for heavy criticism for not being able to keep out the weather.<sup>15</sup> In early 1892 the shelter was enclosed with windows and a door. By 1904 the building was known as the mortuary chapel. The building was later informally named the Jewish Chapel, which came about partly because of its physical proximity to the Jewish section of the cemetery. This was reinforced in the 1950s when the Jewish community took responsibility for the building's maintenance, on the basis that they used the building almost exclusively. The building narrowly escaped demolition in 1965 and in 1967 the Jewish community paid for it to be upgraded. It was restored in 1977-78 by Parks and Recreation, at a cost of \$3000, by which time the Jewish community had moved to a new building at Makara cemetery.<sup>16</sup>

The opening of the Kelburn cable car in 1902 was considered something of a boon to visitors to the cemetery. The cable car offered the third access route to the cemetery – via horse-drawn vehicles along Upland Road, over the viaduct and through the newly constructed Karori Tunnel, which was itself a significant improvement in vehicular access to Karori.

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<sup>12</sup> Church of England 1, Burial Index / Card Index, Karori Cemetery records. The same source provided the first Catholic burial date.

<sup>13</sup> WCC Minute Book, 18 September 1891

<sup>14</sup> 00233:34:1892/774, Rev. Coffey to Town Clerk, WCC Archives.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> History of Mortuary Chapel taken largely from Alington M. 1991, "Mortuary Chapel, Karori Cemetery", prepared for WCC

There is a reference to a request to the Council to build a crematorium at Karori as early as 1891. In April 1898, after the Citizens' Union led a deputation to the Council to plead for a crematorium, the Council undertook consultation to find out the extent of public support for the facility. At a ratepayers' meeting on 1 August that year, a motion put to spend £2000 on a crematorium was lost. It took another eight years before sufficient public support was raised. This time the Council chose to subsidise a crematorium and offered the following in a suitably confusing resolution:

*That if the amount privately subscribed for a crematorium is sufficient, together with £800, to erect one, the latter sum to be provided by the WCC and the erection undertaken.*

The crematorium, including a chapel, was designed by noted Wellington architect John Sydney Swan. Six of the chapel windows were later replaced with stained glass windows designed and made in the An Tur Gloine (Tower of Glass) factory in Dublin. Five of the windows were donated by Wellington Harbour Board Engineer William Ferguson and his family over a period from 1914 onwards. The first ashes were installed in the chapel and after those niches were filled, cavities were built in columbaria outside. While the crematorium was half funded by public subscription – evidence of a demand for cremations – it took over two decades before the facility had any substantial impact on the overall number of interments.

Two significant events in 1918 had a considerable impact on the cemetery. One was the end of World War I, and with it came the first burials in what became the Services Cemetery. The setting aside of specific areas for war dead followed the New Zealand Government signing the Royal Charter of 1917 between the Commonwealth (then Imperial) War Graves Commission, and the governments of the Commonwealth on the care of war graves. The government actually began allocating money for the maintenance of war graves as early as 1911 and the first Inspector of War Graves, Edith Statham, was appointed to the Department of Internal Affairs in 1913. The care of war graves grew to encompass fallen servicemen from subsequent wars, as well as local veterans. The dedication of the cemetery was followed, over time, by the construction of memorial structures, such as a lychgate (1921), the Wellington Provincial Memorial Arch (1931), sundial, seats and marble steps, as well as the planting of numerous commemorative trees. Throughout the 1920s a considerable effort was made to improve the landscaping of the Services Cemetery and by the end of the decade it was beautifully presented.

The year 1918 was also the zenith of the influenza epidemic, which spread throughout much of the world and killed millions of people. In Wellington the peak came towards the end of the year. On one day, 19 November, 63 people were buried in the cemetery, the greatest number of interments in one day, ever. In one week – 17-23 November – 340 people were buried. November was the busiest ever month, with 708 burials. From 1 April 1918 to 31 March 1919, 1604 people were interred in Karori Cemetery.<sup>17</sup>

Images from the 1920s show a cemetery in remarkably good order. By then the tree and shrub plantings, landscaping and buildings had matured and, in the hands of an obviously attentive staff, the cemetery looked exceedingly picturesque. In particular, the 'shop-window' showed the expenditure of a considerable effort. Further afield, however, was probably another matter.

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<sup>17</sup> Sexton's Notebook and Diary 1929-1939, Karori Cemetery records.

### **An expanding cemetery**

By 1927 there had been 27,115 burials and there was a pressing need for more land. Demand for the crematorium was initially moderate but the number of cremations grew, helping to slow the demand for the increasingly short supply of land. The important role the crematorium played in relieving pressure on available land was exemplified by the fact that as early as 1928 the then sexton, E.H. Harlen, was complaining about the shortage of land.<sup>18</sup> He even suggested that if more land was not found, the cemetery would have to go to Makara, one of the first recorded suggestions to that effect. The prospect of acquiring or using other land in the immediate vicinity was not considered feasible by the city solicitor, who noted that the “creation of new burial grounds within boroughs is forbidden by Statute.”<sup>19</sup> It would be advisable, he considered, to acquire land in the County of Makara that was “useless for farming purposes”.<sup>20</sup>

The late 1920s was also the first period during which the cemetery came in for regular criticism for its appearance. Prior to this, the cemetery’s size had been manageable, and many graves had been tended by families, but constant expansion and the passage of time was making it impossible to keep more remote parts of the cemetery tidy. The state of the roads and tracks – all unpaved, dusty and weed ridden – was also the subject of criticism from both staff and the general public. So, with the onset of the Depression, unemployed relief workers were put to work on the grounds. Sealing of paths started in 1932, but it was simply impossible to do much with the available budget and staff. More work was done in 1934 when a budget of £200,000 was allocated by the WCC to special unemployed relief works. Unemployed workers cut a track from Wilton to Karori through the bush and cemetery to allow people who had no transport to walk between Karori and the northern suburbs. It quickly overgrew.

The cemetery’s expansion was prodigious. The third public area was opened in 1934, while new portions in the Catholic and Anglican areas were opening at a rate of one every two or three years during the 1920s and 30s. The cemetery had spread from a relatively small area surrounding the crematorium and Mortuary Chapel, to nearly the full extent of the McKenzie purchase. As the lack of space loomed ever larger, drastic measures were taken to alleviate the pressure. It is not known when the practice began, but graves not paid for began to be identified and, if the family did not settle the debt, the remains of the deceased were exhumed and buried elsewhere, frequently in the gaps between abutted graves.<sup>21</sup> These were also the places where many infants were buried. As was always the case with the cemetery, its incomparable records mean it is possible to identify exactly where all these remains were finally reinterred.

The cemetery’s expansion made it more visible than ever and its connection with Karori was not necessarily appreciated by local residents. In 1937 the Karori Progressive Association asked for the name to be changed to the more “euphonic”

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<sup>18</sup> 00001:453:7/25 Pt 1, Cemetery Karori (General), 1927-1935, WCC Archives. Memo to Town Clerk, 3 May 1928

<sup>19</sup> 00001:453:7/25 Pt 1, Cemetery Karori (General), 1927-1935, WCC Archives. City Solicitor to town clerk 19 May 1928.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Pers. comm. Greg Glen, Sexton, Karori. Specific references to the practice are very difficult to find in correspondence files.

(sic) Western Cemetery.<sup>22</sup> The Council, mindful of confusing Wellingtonians and visitors about the absence of an 'eastern' cemetery, turned them down. For all that it seems that the name 'Karori Cemetery' was not enshrined in any gazette notice up to that point and it could more accurately have been described as 'Wellington Cemetery'.<sup>23</sup>

While work went on cleaning up the cemetery, co-ordinated tree and shrub planting was also regularly undertaken. Unfortunately World War II intervened and a shortage of labour meant that, despite the work of willing volunteers, the cemetery quickly reverted to a wilder state. It was to be an uphill battle to get on top of it again. After the war things improved only slightly. There was still a shortage of labour and a constant turnover of staff.

In 1944 the Mayor of Wellington Will Appleton announced that a piece of land on the hill in the north-west corner of the cemetery – initially set aside for cemetery purposes in 1937 – was to be turned into a model lawn cemetery, based on Arlington Cemetery in Washington, which he had seen.<sup>24</sup> In 1945 an amendment to the by-law laid out strict provisions for the new cemetery, to be named Standen Street Cemetery (although that name does not seem to have gained any currency). The provisions included: the stipulation that there should be no protrusions above the level of the lawn, the size of the tablet, the size of the plot and the provision of a standard receptacle for flowers.<sup>25</sup> The cemetery opened two years late, in 1951, after the grass failed to take.<sup>26</sup>

The state of the cemetery attracted a great deal of adverse publicity during 1948 and 1949, but the sexton was powerless to do anything about it, except clean up the grave or path that was the subject of a given complaint. At the beginning of 1949 a *Dominion* article reported that there were 11 permanent staff, but that something like 25 were needed, for 12 months, to clear the cemetery.<sup>27</sup> Along with families failing to tend graves, a lack of committed staff was highlighted as an issue, with the report lamenting that farmers' sons from Makara and Karori, once the mainstay of the workforce, were no longer on the staff.

One response to the constant criticism was the decision to spray large areas of the cemetery to kill off all growth, weeds or otherwise. It is not certain when the weed control regime began but its effect was brutal. It appears to have been largely used on the eastern slopes of the cemetery, above Western Park, and the regular use of poisons meant that when a planting regime began in the 1970s the ground was too toxic to take most plantings. Its effectiveness was illustrated in a photograph in a *Dominion* article in 1972, which shows nothing but bare ground around the graves in that area.

The Tangiwai disaster, when 151 people lost their lives in a train derailment at Tangiwai bridge on Christmas Eve 1953, had its sequel at the cemetery when 76 of the victims were buried in a mass grave. The Duke of Edinburgh attended the funeral of the victims at Karori Cemetery, Wellington, on 31 December 1953. A few months later the grave was exhumed when it became clear that a number of the bodies had

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. Pt. 2 1935-1940. Karori Progressive Association to Town Clerk, 19 May 1937.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. Memo to Town Clerk, 19 May 1937.

<sup>24</sup> *Dominion* 12 October 1944

<sup>25</sup> 00063:20:1945/63, Standen Street: Cemetery: Bylaw (Extension Karori Cemetery) (TC File 5/48)

<sup>26</sup> *Dominion* 14 January 1949

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

been wrongly identified. In 1957 the Government unveiled a plan of a memorial to be built at the mass grave. Designed by government architect F. Gordon Wilson, the memorial was opened by Prime Minister Sidney Holland on 26 March 1957.

#### **A crowded hillside**

The siting of the Tangiwai grave and memorial, at the far north end of the cemetery, aptly demonstrated the accommodation problems the cemetery was experiencing. In 1956 a survey of remaining unused ground suitable for burial revealed that the Catholic portion had 75 plots, Anglican (Church of England) 18, public 70, Greek Orthodox, 250, Jewish, 200 plots and undenominational, 2,200. In addition there were 2,000 unpurchased plots, which were presumably later exhumed and reinterred elsewhere to provide more room. Makara Cemetery was not to open until 1965 so yet more ways of crowding graves into the place were needed. The size of the cemetery, and its bewildering layout, led to the Lions Club suggesting to the mayor, in 1960, that each road be numbered, in a manner similar to Manhattan, New York. The idea was never taken up.

Funeral directors gained a considerable boon during the 1950s with the introduction of automatic, hydraulic coffin lowering equipment. The Council purchased several models of the 'Oshkosh' variety and then made them available to the various firms who plied their trade.

The popularity of cremation grew slowly but steadily during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but increased dramatically shortly before World War II. In 1911, for instance, cremations made up just 1.3% of the combined total of burials and cremations, and even by 1930 the figure was still only 7.5%. But just six years later the figure had jumped to 24.4%<sup>28</sup> and by 1947-48 it stood at 45.7%. There were about 1500 burials a year. The pressure on the crematorium at Karori, then the only one in Wellington, became immense. The sheer number of cremations meant that the first exterior columbarium was constructed in 1937; niches were previously provided inside the chapel. A new crematorium and chapel was mooted in 1937 and again in 1942, but not necessarily at Karori. After the war, the matter was raised again and this time planning began in earnest.

An elevated site was chosen at the cemetery on a vestige of the McKenzie estate, above the Services Cemetery. It was to be reached independently via Rosehaugh Avenue. William Gray Young, of Gray Young, Morton and Young agreed to draw up plans in 1947. Tenders were not called until 1954 and work itself did not finish until 1957, at a cost of £34,926. Unfortunately, leaking windows meant the chapel did not open until 1960, and even by then the problem had not been fixed. It was not until 1966 that the matter was finally resolved, after numerous attempts at reglazing, protection and sealing. It was a saga that exasperated all involved and was a source of great embarrassment to the Council at a period when the chapel and crematorium were sorely needed to meet a demand that ran to as many as 14 cremations a day.

Allied to the construction of the chapel was the laying of a Garden of Remembrance. Various plans were drawn up and inspiration was sought from overseas examples, such as Lawns Wood at Leeds Crematorium.<sup>29</sup> In 1966 a plaque was installed in the garden. It read:

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. n.d. but presumably 1944.

<sup>29</sup> 0001:451:7/5/7, Cemetery: Karori: Crematorium Chapel: Garden of Remembrance, 1929-75. See booklet on file.

*This garden is a resting place for all those wishing to linger and remember their loved ones who have passed on.*

In 1960 the director of parks and reserves suggested the establishment of a rose garden near the entrance to the cemetery. Constructed at an estimated cost of £1875, with £750 for piping of water, it involved the removal of a toilet block and its reconstruction at the far end of the garden. A remembrance monument was built abutting the western fence. Work finished in October that year. The monument and toilet still stand but the garden was replaced by a new arrangement in 1990.

Karori Cemetery's northern aspect remained a mixture of forest and rural farmland nearly 70 years after its establishment and there were occasional complaints of sheep in the lawn cemetery. It was traced to a boundary gate left open by the adjacent farmer.

### **Two cemeteries**

On 23 March 1965, Makara Cemetery opened for its first burial. The land had been bought during the 1940s in expectation of the day Karori closed to new burials, which seemed to have been anticipated for decades. The handover had been put off for a long time but even in March 1965 there were still 1000 plots left for purchase at Karori.

With burials predominantly taking place at Makara, management of Karori altered, as did public perceptions of the cemetery. Burials still took place, many in pre-purchased family plots (as they still do), but the emphasis shifted to stabilisation of the existing and the future of the cemetery without burials. There was still not enough money to manage the cemetery and the drop in income from burials did not help. Beautification though became a higher priority, especially after the Council once again received complaints about the cemetery's appearance.

In 1970, having sensibly waited until the nearby Wilton Tip had closed, the Wilton Residents' Association made their views known about the view of the cemetery from their suburb. The suburb was expanding quickly and the association wanted the "stark and unattractive" cemetery beautified. It floated several possibilities for how that might be achieved, including tree planting or the removal of the gravestones. The Northland Residents' Association soon weighed in as well. In 1972 the Wilton Residents' Association specifically called for the gravestone laden cemetery to be turned into a lawn.<sup>30</sup> This brought inevitable protests from people who had erected more traditional headstones.

The prevailing vegetation management regime, which had left the gravestones looking so stark, was described by Ian Galloway, longstanding Director of Parks and Reserves, in 1972:

*The continual spraying with total weed killer at the Karori Cemetery has been necessary over the last few years to control the very heavily overgrown areas of the cemetery. This has denuded quite a large portion of land and the spraying to date has been the cause of some erosion of almost vertical banks in the steeper areas of the cemetery.*

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<sup>30</sup> 00001:453:7/25 Pt 8, Cemetery Karori (General), 1973-1982, WCC Archives. Wilton Residents' Association to Town Clerk, 8 July 1974.

Galloway did not see the removal of the gravestones as viable, so the Council's response was the institution of a tree-planting programme, despite the residents complaining that it would take too long. Some 4,670 trees and shrubs were planted during the 1975 growing season.<sup>31</sup> In some areas only eucalypts were able to survive in the toxic soil, but they were successful to such an extent that today they present their own management issue.

On 19 July 1974 another milestone in the cemetery's history came with the belated closing of the 'Main Denominational and Roman Catholic' areas to new plot purchasers. Other plot purchases were to continue but they also eventually closed. Today only pre-purchased plots are used for burials.

The 1970s and 80s were a time of increasing vandalism to graves, a problem that has plagued the cemetery from early in its history. One of the worst such incidences was the damage to 50 headstones in the Chinese section in February 1988. There was speculation that it may have been racially motivated, but Chinese community leaders regarded it as something less sinister.

That same year the Council received a serious proposal to build a large mausoleum in the cemetery. The Auckland firm involved, Wingmore Investments, proposed to build a 3,000 burial mausoleum (with room for a further 500 cremations urns) in a 'valley' somewhere in the crowded cemetery.<sup>32</sup> The structure was intended to last many hundreds of years. It was an ambitious proposal, but it gained guarded approval at first. Later, however, the sheer cost per burial (\$7,425), the lack of a confirmed market or interest in the concept, and the possible loss of revenue from traditional burials or cremations led the Council to reject the concept.<sup>33</sup>

In 1991 the cemetery celebrated 100 years of operation. The Rose Garden was redeveloped by contractors Horokiwi Paving Specialists to a design by the Council. The final cost of the revamp was \$45,257. A remembrance monument in the garden was retained. The main gates and those at the Standen Street entrance were rebuilt to designs by landscape architect Neil Aitken that same year. The cemetery held an open day and, as part of the celebrations, located and restored Frederick Fish's grave, the cemetery's first.

In 1991 scenes filmed in the cemetery for Peter Jackson's third film *Brain Dead* had their repercussions the following year when a close-up of a tombstone appeared in one scene. The family in question objected and the matter ended up in court. The outcome is not known.

The most significant change to interment arrangements in recent years came in 1994 with the decision to allow the spreading of funerary ashes in the rose garden beds and the mounting of bronze plaques as memorials to cremated individuals.

In 2001 a quality management system for the cemeteries and crematoria was developed by Telarc Ltd and certification to ISO 9001 was gained in September 2001.

The Karori Historical Society has taken an increasing interest in the cemetery in recent years and helped put together a thematic walk based on the graves of those

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. Memo from Director of Parks and Reserves (Galloway), 1 September 1975.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. Pt.9. Director Parks and Recreation to Town Clerk, 26 August 1988.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. Mausoleum Sub-Committee to City Secretary, 26 March 1990.

who perished during the sinking of the *SS Penguin* in 1909. The walk was opened in 2003. The society has also helped identify graves of significant people.

Other community associations have developed through voluntary clean-ups by various groups, ranging from schoolchildren to Karori Lions. Cemetery staff have engaged local schools as a way of introducing the cemetery's resources and history to children and encouraging their lifelong interest. The Council has held clean-up days of its own when Wellingtonians have been encouraged to bring their own tools for the job. Work continues to this day on the transformation of the cemetery into a park.

### **The public and the cemetery**

The cemetery's managers have always had one difficulty in common, from 1891 to the present day – attempting to meet public expectations. The cemetery rarely received plaudits. During research for this Plan, only a handful of compliments to staff could be located in cemetery files.

The vast majority of correspondence, other than requests for information about a deceased person, were complaints, and generally they were criticisms of the state of the cemetery. As stated above, the cemetery appears to have been in particularly good shape in early 1920s – well maintained and attractively presented. But the sheer size of the cemetery, the lack of staff, the loss of interest by families in their plots, and many competing demands, all contributed to the decline in the cemetery's appearance. As time went on, graves, paths or even whole areas were frequently cleared on demand rather than as part of a systematic clean-up. It was more than likely they would be in as poor a state as ever within a few years.

More often than not, a specific criticism would be linked to an attempt to locate a family grave. One, very typical, example was a letter to the town clerk from a Northland resident, in 1969.

*My sister and I went over to visit my parents' grave...at Catholic part – Karori Cemetery last Monday and found it most difficult to get there, with blackberries all over, both paths and graves. Had to hold them aside many, many times to get through and then to fly back on us. We are both in our seventys (sic) and found it most difficult.*

*Could not some of the unemployed lend a hand to clean it up, as it would be big help to senior citizens to find their way without the paths being blocked. It is a long way round to have to make out through all those blackberries.*

*Trust you will look into the matter and have something done.<sup>34</sup>*

As always, the town clerk sought a response from the sexton, who in this case told him (as he often did) “as this letter came to hand, the whole block in this portion of the cemetery was being scythed.” As the sexton indicated he would follow up with the usual dose of weedkiller, the town clerk was able to confidently tell Mrs Lee that she would have no difficulty reaching the grave next time she visited. The reference to the unemployed was also a regular theme of letter writers from the 1930s

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<sup>34</sup> 00001:453:7/25 Pt 7, Cemetery: Karori (General) 1969-1972, WCC Archives. R. Lee to town clerk, 3 February 1969

onwards. It was inconceivable to many that those out of work could not be usefully employed on such work.

Newspapers also made much of the state of the cemetery. During particular periods, such as 1948-49 and much of the 1970s the cemetery came in for particular attention. Newspapers would monitor the condition of the cemetery, and would delight in horror stories about overgrowth or broken graves, but the situation at Karori was invariably no worse than any other cemetery in the wider Wellington region.

A smaller but no less interesting form of communication with cemetery officials came with the outfall from family disputes. In time-honoured fashion, families frequently fell out over funerals, and some even disputed the right of a particular family member to be buried in a family grave. This occurred with any kind of grave, even vaults. Without considering the propriety of involving the town clerk, sexton, or his staff in these bitter altercations, some members of the public would put pen to paper and occasionally divulge the most extraordinarily intimate matters.

### **Planting and beautification**

Records of co-ordinated planting are sporadic. It is impossible to know whether this reflects a similarly haphazard approach to planting or incomplete records, but it is sometimes difficult to distinguish a regular schedule of planting. For all that, comments on file, such as “next year’s planting”, and instructions to plant more of a certain variety suggest that yearly planting was a key part of cemetery management for long periods. This was certainly so of the period 1933-1948, as correspondence files show, and the period 1972-75, when tree planting took place on a level never seen before or since.

Karori Cemetery was indeed windswept and bleak in the 1890s and an urgent requirement was the planting of trees to provide shelter and visual interest. The first trees – pines it is thought – were planted very early on, some as markers at the end of rows. This planting was done by staff but occasionally augmented by families. In the case of the latter, they were primarily concerned with improving appearances around a grave. Some macrocarpa must have been among early plantings as the *Dominion* reported in 1950<sup>35</sup> that “giant” macrocarpa were being felled at the cemetery, some of 200 to be felled over the ensuing three years. Records researched have revealed the following, in chronological order:

Pines were planted in the Wilton Road area in 1927 as a screen. These pines, many of which still stand, were planted towards the northerly end of the eastern boundary.

In 1935 the Beautifying Society asked for gates to be built at the cemetery. A sketch plan was drawn and the cost of the work was estimated at £160.<sup>36</sup> It would appear that the plan was not actioned.

In 1938 the Cemeteries Committee instructed the sexton to plant “more ornamental and flowering trees and shrubs”.<sup>37</sup> The response was that as soon as, for example, pohutukawa were planted they were stolen. That same year the sexton reported the following to the Cemeteries Committee:

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<sup>35</sup> *Dominion* 24 March 1950.

<sup>36</sup> 00001:453:7/25 Pt 2, Cemetery Karori (General), 1935-40, WCC Archives. Beautifying Society to town clerk, 21 December 1935.

<sup>37</sup> 00001:454:7/26 Pt 1, Cemetery: Karori – Trees, 1927-1950, WCC Archives. Report of Cemeteries Committee, August 1938.

*The season's planting has now been completed and comprised the planting of 100 pinus insignis in replacement of failures in last year's work in connection with gorse extermination, 200 macrocarpa and 500 eucalyptus viminalis (sic) planted on waste land in areas suitable for large trees and pohutukawa, karo, and acacia longifolia (sic) in belts between burial blocks. Hedges in the Soldiers' Cemetery have been completed by the planting of escallonia exoniensis (sic) and further planting has been made of pohutukawa, karo, veronica (sic), clianthus (sic) and retinospora plumosa (sic). Steep windswept slopes on which it has been found difficult to establish indigenous trees have been planted with acacia decurrens (sic), which when established will afford shelter for native varieties.<sup>38</sup>*

In 1939 the town clerk reported that it was the policy of the Council to screen the cemetery boundaries, although this was obviously not felt necessary on the eastern boundary facing Western Park, until residents complained in the early 1970s. For all that, the Standen Street boundary had no plantings on it as late as the 1930s.

In 1948 a list of trees, shrubs and hedges, planted from 1933 onwards, was prepared. It was as follows:

Cupressus Lawsoniana (sic)	240
Cupressus macrocarpa	350
Cupressus Benthami (sic)	6
Pinus insignis (sic)	1,700
Eucalyptus viminalis	600
Italian cypress	12
Acacia longifolia (sic)	42
Acacia decurrens (sic)	100
Phittosporum nigrescens (sic)	50
Phittosporum crassifolium (sic)	50
Karaka (most destroyed by hares)	110
Rhododendrons	46
Pohutukawa	24
Lonicera nitida (hedge) (sic)	300
Escallonia exoniensis (hedge) (sic)	482
Escallonia pendula (hedge)	200
90 assorted flowering and ornamental shrubs (azalea, protea, cotoneaster, Japanese cherry, lasiandra, erica, ceanothus, acacia Baileyana (sic), euc. Ficifolia (sic), erythina (sic) etc.)	
Does not include Arbor Day planting by outside bodies or trees and shrubs raised at cemetery or obtained from prison nurseries, no record kept of these. <sup>39</sup>	

Tree felling (of macrocarpa), which began in 1950, continued into 1951. There was more in the mid-1950s.

In 1972, as discussed in the history above, the Wellington City Council announced a massive tree-planting project in the cemetery. A report in the *Dominion* summarised

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. Sexton to Cemeteries Committee, 1 September 1938. Note the large number of misspellings.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 11 June 1948. Prepared presumably by sexton. Again, note the large number of misspellings.

the director of parks and reserves, Ian Galloway's intentions by saying that "...a variety of trees would be planted. As well as beautifying the area they would help the erosion problem and would provide a canopy for the cemetery from the housing areas expanding on the surrounding land."<sup>40</sup>

As noted above, some 4,670 trees and shrubs were planted during the 1975 growing season and the intensive planting continued for the next few years. Tree and shrub pruning, removal and planting continue to this day.

One side effect of maturing trees was the destruction caused by falling limbs or whole trees. Vulnerable graves were frequently badly damaged by such events, often leading to complaints from the public about damage to family headstones and memorials.

One notable but relatively unheralded feature of the beautification of the cemetery has been the use of stonewalls as revetting for banks, as borders to paths and roads, and as structural support for roads. This stonework, now widespread throughout the cemetery, received little comment in official files but has done a great deal towards improving the appearance of the cemetery.

### **Services cemetery**

The establishment of the Services Cemetery (this is the expression used in this document to refer to the site of war graves and veterans' graves) in Karori Cemetery in 1918 was an early example in New Zealand of the way official war graves were created within public cemeteries. Most comparable overseas countries have dedicated war cemeteries. At Karori, the government has always contributed to the upkeep to part of the cemetery as part of its responsibilities as a signatory to the Royal Charter of 1917 between the Commonwealth (then Imperial) War Graves Commission and the governments of the Commonwealth.

The Services Cemetery received special attention, despite frequently falling into a poor state at various times. When the cemetery road was first paved in the early 1930s, it was extended only as far as the soldiers' graves and no further. Initially, graves were marked with white crosses. Eventually these were replaced with the characteristic (and identical) simple headstones.

The Services Cemetery was initially confined to the area bounded, on the west, by the road, to the east by private land, to the south by the narrowing land and to the north by the Crematorium. The South African veterans' cemetery was directly behind the Crematorium. In the late 1930s, the purchase of private land on Rosehaugh Avenue, the balance of the McKenzie land, was mooted. Comprising some 1.5 hectares, the land was acquired in 1942 and then augmented by the purchase of an unused, private section (sold 10 years earlier) in the middle of it. This eventually allowed the extension of the Services Cemetery at a time when New Zealand soldiers were dying in an overseas war, and the eventual construction of a new crematorium and garden in the late 1950s.

The cemetery contains two kinds of soldiers' graves: those on regular duty who died within New Zealand during wartime, and all other veterans. Until 1999 both types of graves were managed by the Ministry for Culture and Heritage and its predecessor, the Department of Internal Affairs. From that date, veterans' graves became the

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<sup>40</sup> *Dominion* 1 March 1972.

responsibility of Veterans' Affairs, a branch of the New Zealand Defence Force, and the Ministry retained the balance. Karori is one of 177 services cemeteries in New Zealand. If a service person's death is deemed to be attributable to war service then the headstone is provided free of charge by Veterans' Affairs. A service person's death not attributable to war service is entitled to a memorial or plaque at a subsidised rate.

Over a period of time, a number of features have been added to the Services Cemetery to commemorate those buried there, and overseas. A lychgate was constructed in 1921, the Wellington Provincial Memorial Arch in 1931, as well as a sundial, seats and marble steps. Numerous commemorative trees were also planted.

Every year on ANZAC Day, veterans, their families and supporters come to lay wreaths and commemorate their fellow dead soldiers.

Management of the Services Cemetery is today paid for partly by a grant from Veterans' Affairs to the Wellington City Council. The majority of graves in the Services Cemetery are veterans' graves. The Ministry for Culture and Heritage is fully responsible for 268 WWI and 124 WWII headstones, 35 cremation plaques (some on the walls by the small Crematorium Chapel and some on the back brick wall on Rosehaugh Avenue) and the Wellington Provincial Memorial, which straddles the two sections of the soldiers' headstone portion.

Cleaning of headstones, repainting and repairs of war graves are all done in situ to specifications written by the Ministry. All work is done by relevant trained professionals on-site.

Graves in areas under Veterans' Affairs are cleaned and relettered as part of an annual capital works programme. This work is always done on-site and by suitably trained persons. Veterans' Affairs does not have written specifications for standards and methods of cleaning and maintaining graves. A leaflet is supplied to families to guide the care of memorials they purchase; these are subsidised by Veterans' Affairs.

### **Crematorium, chapels and columbaria**

Cremation is an ancient custom. It has been continually practised in a number of eastern countries, but was abandoned in many countries that converted to Christianity. The modern cremation movement began in Europe in the 1870s. In 1974, not long after an efficient cremation oven was perfected in Italy, Queen Victoria's surgeon, Sir Henry Thompson, founded the Cremation Society of England. He saw cremation as a means of fighting disease. The first crematorium in Europe was built at Woking, England in 1874.

The first crematorium at Karori, a chapel and oven behind, was designed by John Sydney Swan and opened in 1909. It was New Zealand's first. The practise took some time to be adopted and even though the crematorium was partly funded by public subscription, cremations made up just 1.3% of all disposals in the first year. In fact it took until the late 1930s before cremations seriously rivalled burials as a means of disposal.

The sudden spurt of enthusiasm for cremation meant that the first crematorium could not cope with the demand and before World War II ended, a new crematorium was suggested. War intervened and in 1947 it was proposed that the existing crematorium be extended. In raising the need for the new building, the town clerk told the Cemeteries Committee:

*The existing chapel was designed in 1909 when cremation was looked upon as a doubtful innovation. It is now inadequate in floor space, in accommodation for mourners and has a very doleful atmosphere internally. There is room to double the floor space and to provide a more cheerful internal affect.<sup>41</sup>*

When it was realised that land could be secured behind the existing structure, designs for a new chapel were commissioned from Gray Young Morton and Young. But it took another 10 years before the building was finally completed. The first difficulty was securing the land, and as a result it took until 1954 for tenders to be called. Cremation would continue to be done in the oven behind the old chapel, with coffins moved there on a conveyor belt through a tunnel.

The chapel was, for all intents and purposes, completed in 1959 but did not open immediately because of persistently leaking windows, the source of which proved impossible to determine. With demand for ceremonies impossible to meet, the chapel opened in 1960, but the leaks continued. The architects and the Council tried everything they could to fix the problem, but in the end the Council took matters into its own hands and covered the windows with a false outer layer of glazing.<sup>42</sup>

By 1973 the chapel was handling up to 14 disposals a day. In more recent years, with the proliferation of private cremation facilities at funeral homes, use of the building has been reduced to perhaps three a week.

The first crematorium chapel meanwhile was revealed to contain significant art works in its fabric. In 1984, Ian Galloway, director of parks and recreation, was informed that the chapel windows were an historic set of An Tur Gloine (Tower of Glass) stained glass windows created as memorials to members of the family of William Ferguson, Wellington Harbour Board engineer. The windows are considered among the finest created by the studio outside Ireland. The Dublin-based studio produced some of the finest stained glass work of the 20th century. Two of the windows, 'Faith' and 'Hope', created in 1914, are the work of Wilhelmina Geddes. Three more, 'Charity' (1930), 'Love' (1931) and 'Wisdom' (1947), were made by Michael Healy. The final window, 'Gethsemane' (1939), was designed by Hubert McGoldrick. Stained glass restorer Fiona Ciaran restored the windows at a cost of \$13,000 in 1984.

### **Columbaria**

The first ashes were stored inside the chapel and it was some time before an exterior columbarium was required. Like the new crematorium, its construction was a response to the sudden increase in demand for cremations in the late 1930s. In the end, five separate columbaria were built.

Erected behind the old crematorium in 1937, the first columbarium was designed by the City Engineer's office and built by contractor A. Lemmon for £1276.18.3.<sup>43</sup> Two

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<sup>41</sup> 0001:450:7/5/2 Cemetery: Karori: Crematorium Chapel (General) Pt.1, WCC Archives. Memo to chairman, Cemeteries Committee, 29 January 1947.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 13 December 1966.

<sup>43</sup> 0009:266:7/2/1 Pt.1, Columbarium – Karori Cemetery, City Engineer's Department, 4 March 1935.

years later, additions to the columbarium, “additional niches, marble slabs” were done by Hickmott and Sons, monumental sculptors.<sup>44</sup>

In 1939 the Council ordered the construction of memorial tablets for the new niches and monumental mason H. Glover was the successful tenderer. The cost was £259.3.6.<sup>45</sup>

Photographs taken late in World War II show a new brick columbarium above the Services’ Cemetery. There is no file record indicating the date of construction of this particular columbarium.

In 1948 more niches were required and a plan was prepared by the City Engineer for 560 niches (1120 boxes), to be built to the side of the old chapel. Only one tender was received – from A. Lemmon – and as their price (£1242) was within the suggested estimate, they got the job.<sup>46</sup> It was completed in October 1949. The marble plaques were provided by Fletcher Construction, at a cost of £619.<sup>47</sup>

The next columbarium wall was planned for the entrance to the Services’ Cemetery, near the Lychgate, with the back of the wall used for the ashes of deceased ex-servicemen. The accommodation was to be five bays with 1,190 niches, the largest yet. The successful tenderer was Jones-Rees, Structural Engineers and Contractors. Work was completed in 1955.<sup>48</sup>

The next wall was proposed in 1960. It was to be built further down the drive, not far from the Mortuary Chapel. Work began in 1962 and this time it appears to have been done by the council itself, again to a design by the City Engineer, with the principal building materials being concrete blocks made by the Council itself.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, sometime in the 1980s,<sup>50</sup> the brick columbarium built near the second chapel, abutting Rosehaugh Avenue, was extended.

### Chronology

1842	Bolton Street and Mount Street Cemeteries established.
1882	Cemeteries Act passed.
1890	Karori wins a ballot for the site of the new cemetery. McKenzie brothers agree in principle to accept the council’s offer for their land. The Council raises loan of £7500 for new cemetery.
1891	McKenzie brothers and council sign sale agreement. Work completed on new road from Polhill Gully to Karori.
August 1891	Frederick William Fish, an infant, is first burial at Karori Cemetery.
	Public shelter built in cemetery, later to be named Mortuary Chapel.
February 1892	First regular burials at Karori. Church burials consecrated. Sexton E.A. Nash appointed.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 17 September 1937, Memo to City Engineer.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 13 July 1939.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 19 October 1949.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 17 July 1949.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 6 May 1954.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 1 October 1962.

<sup>50</sup> More precise date required.

1892	Shelter converted into chapel.
1903	Second public burial section opened.
1909	Crematorium built to a design by John Sydney Swan.
1913	Second Church of England (Anglican) burial section opened.
1918	World War I ends. First organised burials of soldiers in cemetery. Influenza epidemic claims hundreds of Wellingtonians and cemetery has busiest period of its history, with 63 people buried on one day in November alone.
1921	Lychgate built in Services Cemetery.
1931	Memorial Arch built in Services Cemetery.
1932	Sealing of main road begins. Other roads and paths progressively sealed over following decades.
1934	A large group of unemployed workers is put to work in the cemetery. Walking track from Wilton to Karori built through cemetery land.
1937	Third public burial section opened. WCC land near the Standen Street gates set aside for cemetery purposes. Later used for Wellington's first lawn cemetery. First columbarium constructed behind crematorium. Construction of new crematorium mooted. First Greek Orthodox burial section opened.
1944	Mayor of Wellington, Will Appleton, announces the establishment of a lawn cemetery.
1945	Second Catholic burial section opened.
1947	Gray Young, Morton and Young draw up plans for new crematorium chapel, to be built above Services Cemetery.
1948-49	Second columbarium constructed alongside old crematorium chapel.
1951	Lawn cemetery at Standen Street opened.
1953	76 of the victims of the Tangiwai Disaster are buried in cemetery.
1955	Third columbarium built between road and Services Cemetery. Second Greek Orthodox burial section opened.
1957	Tangiwai Memorial opened in cemetery.
1959	New crematorium chapel finished but not opened until 1960.
1960	Rose garden established near main entrance.
1962	Fourth columbarium built alongside main drive near Mortuary Chapel.
March 1965	Makara Cemetery opens for burials.
1966	Garden of Remembrance opened alongside new crematorium.
1972	Decision made to plant trees on cemetery slopes facing Wilton and Northland, after complaints from local residents' association.
1973	A peak of crematorium use is reached, with up to 14 disposals a day.
1974	Main denominational and Roman Catholic areas closed to new plot purchasers.
1984	Internationally significant stained glass windows in old crematorium chapel restored.

February 1988	50 headstones in Chinese section vandalised.
1991	Cemetery centenary. Rose Garden redesigned and rebuilt. New gates installed at main entrance and Seaforth and Standen Street entrances. Open day held and Frederick William Fish's grave, the first in the cemetery, located and restored.
1990s	Fifth and last columbarium built alongside Rosehaugh Avenue crematorium chapel.
1994	Permission given for ash disposal and bronze plaque mounting in Rose Garden.
2001	Certification to ISO 9001 was gained in September 2001 after quality management system for the cemeteries and crematorium was developed by Telarc Ltd.
2003	SS Penguin walk opened