

Historic cemetery in sad disrepair

A 120-year-old cemetery on the outskirts of New Plymouth is getting overgrown with weeds and grass, its graves have been covered with sheep droppings and its headstone are becoming damaged.

But the church which administers the land says it has no legal right to interfere with the graves. It

believes the families of those buried there are responsible for keeping the graves tidy.

Lying alongside Devon Rd, Bell Block, the cemetery was once a part of St Luke's Anglican Church. That church has now been sold and the land is administered by the Bell Block Co-operating Parish Church Committee, on

behalf of the Anglican Trust Board.

The chairman of the committee, Mr John Cooper, said his church was very much aware of the cemetery's state and had been concerned about it for some time.

It was planning to have a series of working bees to remove old and tatty trees along the boundaries, but did not have a lot of people or money for such maintenance work.

No right

The church had never intended to let the cemetery get into a messy state, he said. But it did not have the right to interfere with graves, even when they became dilapidated. Nor was it under any obligation to keep them tidy. That was the responsibility of relatives, said Mr Cooper.

However, it did try to keep the grass cropped within the cemetery. In the past sheep had occasionally grazed the area to keep the grass down, although this would stop under new leasing arrangements.

Mr Cooper said the church had done its best with the limited financial

resources available to it but he stressed that its primary concern was for the people of Bell Block placing them ahead of land and buildings.

St Luke's cemetery has about 40 or so graves in it, some dating back to 1861. The most recent burial there was in 1923 and at least one New Plymouth person is known to have an unmarked grave there.

While any grave weathering the last 100 years could be expected to reflect the ravages of time, it is the cemetery as a whole that is untidy.

The grazing sheep haven't helped. They were not fussy about where they left their droppings and graves have collected a good deal of them.

Many concrete grave covers are cracking, holes have appeared in one and wrought iron fencing around others is falling apart.

One headstone is completely hidden by an overgrown hydrangea, while another grave is lost beneath a two-metre-high ferned plant. Others are plagued by thistles and a persistent creeping grass.

The only bright spot at the moment are the early spring snowdrops scattered throughout the cemetery.

Gate smashed

The attention of The Dalrymple was first drawn to St Luke's cemetery when its attractive memorial lychgate (rooded gateway) was smashed in a recent car accident. It is one of the last visible reminders to motorists on Devon Rd that St Luke's ever existed.

The gate was built in 1914 after fund-raising efforts by the St Luke's Ladies Guild, although it was never dedicated. A matching stone-and-concrete fence was added many years later.

Mr Cooper said the lychgate had been an attractive feature and was certainly of sentimental value.

Because it was built as a memorial, all possible steps would be taken to re-erect it and its repair would be the subject of an insurance claim. In the meantime, it was not considered to be a safety hazard, he said.

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New bishop announced

PA DUNEDIN. The fifth Roman Catholic Bishop of the Dunedin diocese, the Most Rev L A Boyle, will be installed by Cardinal Thomas Williams at St Joseph's Cathedral, Dunedin, on August 19.

Bishop Boyle, who was ordained co-sidiator bishop in 1983, succeeds the late Bishop Kavanagh.

Bishop Boyle, 55, was born and brought up in Southland and is the first bishop from within the boundaries of the diocese, the first Southlander to be confirmed bishop, and the fifth to fill the post in the 115-year history of the diocese.

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Gone but not forgotten, read the fallen remains of this headstone from last century. Appearances can be deceiving.

BELOW: The only bright spot in an otherwise forlorn area. Snowdrops and arum lilies adorn many of the graves, although one (left rear) was completely lost beneath an overgrown hydrangea.



A broken cross, cracks and holes in the concrete covering, grass taking over and sheep droppings... the grave of a 27-year-old woman who died in 1909.

BELOW: One of the last visible reminders to motorists on Devon Rd that St Luke's Anglican Church was once here... a memorial lychgate, built in 1914. It came to grief recently during a car accident, although steps are being taken to see if it can be repaired.



The remains of a crucifixion scene on the grave of a 25-year-old man who died in 1911.

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