An Introduction to the Cemetery

Akaroa Roman Catholic and Dissenters Cemetery
Cemeteries: Where are they?

Old cemeteries can be found in almost every older city and town in New Zealand. They are often found in rural areas where no town now appears to exist.

Above: To get to the Drybread Cemetery near Omakau in the Maniototo you need to drive across farm paddocks.

There is most likely a cemetery somewhere near where you live and go to school. Have you ever visited your local cemetery?
Cemeteries: Size

Old cemeteries vary greatly in size.

Below: Cape Saunders lighthouse children’s cemetery. There are two graves here.

Above: Dunedin’s Northern Cemetery is a large, city cemetery with many thousands of burials.

Some are very large. Others may contain only a few graves. Some may even be lone graves. They are all cemeteries.
Cemeteries

Old cemeteries can be found in many different kinds of places.

Anderson’s Bay Cemetery overlooks the Pacific Ocean

Waitati Cemetery overlooks the estuary at Blueskin Bay - Dunedin

Some, especially those near the coast, are often located on a hill and have a beautiful view. Plots that overlooked water were valued.
Cemeteries

Others can be found on a small areas of land sometimes right in the middle of a large city.

Above: St John’s Anglican Cemetery Waikouaiti – East Otago.

Some, especially Anglican cemeteries, are part of the churchyard.

Above: Rutherford St. Cemetery, Woolston, Christchurch.
Special Cemeteries 1

Most cemeteries were established to provide a means of disposing of the dead for the people of a town or city.

Some cemeteries have been created for a special purpose.

Below: The Tararua Acre Cemetery was established to bury those bodies washed ashore after the wreck of the S.S. Tararua in 1881.

Above: The Quarantine Island Cemetery was established for passengers who died while in quarantine from a ship arriving in port carrying a contagious disease. The Otago Station operated from 1863 – 1920.
Special areas of our Cemeteries

There were many different kinds of special purpose areas set aside in the general cemeteries.

Below: The soldiers cemeteries are special areas set aside for those men who returned from New Zealand’s war service. These are the returned servicemen’s areas.

Above: Non Christian communities also needed to bury their dead and often special areas of a cemetery were set aside for cultural groups such as Chinese and Jewish communities.
Cemeteries

Prior to 1920, that is in Victorian and Edwardian times, cemeteries were much more than places for burying the dead.

Cemeteries were carefully crafted landscapes reflecting what people thought was appropriate, beautiful and even educational. So today we have amazing statues and headstones combined with inscriptions and plants that can tell us so much about those who have lived before us... if we look carefully.

List some of the things you think you might see when you walk into a heritage cemetery today...

Waipori Cemetery, Tuapeka. The once thriving gold town of Waipori no longer exists.
How many did you guess?

Inscriptions
Day by day the voice saith come
Enter thine eternal home
Asking not if we can spare
This dear soul, it summons there.

Headstones
In memory of
Rev. Thomas Burns DD
First Minister of
The Church of Otago
Erected by
The First Church, Dunedin
Died 23rd Jan. 1974
In the 77th year of his age. Pray for the soul of
Clementina Grant Burns
Born 9th May 1803
Died 20th Apr. 1884
Agnes Burns
Died 30th Dec. 1872

Statues

Trees

Fences

Stone corner posts

Flowers
Cemeteries are laid out with roads, paths, and divided into blocks and plots, in a similar way to a city.

You can see the roads, grass paths, blocks and the individual plots in this aerial photo taken of Dunedin’s Northern Cemetery.
Cemetery layout 2

Just like visiting a new city or town you will need a map to find places.

This is a map of the Northern Cemetery. You can see the roads (grey) pathways (white) and blocks (yellow) marked. The blocks are numbered to make them easier to find.

Some cemeteries provide maps online but you may have to go to your council or library if these are not available online.

Map of Dunedin's Northern Cemetery sourced from:
This is a detailed plot map showing individual numbered plots in a portion of Dunedin’s Northern Cemetery. The numbers N-119 are the block numbers.

Plot map sourced from Sexton’s Cottage Northern Cemetery: Southern Heritage Trust.
Cemetery layout 4

Cemeteries were also often laid out according to religious affiliations with separate sections for separate religious groups.

In Dunedin’s Southern Cemetery there are separate sections for Anglican, Roman Catholic, and protestants called the General section. There are also a separate Chinese and Jewish sections. In later cemeteries these distinctions are much less noticeable.

In some places different religious groups even had different cemeteries. Below: This is the Dissenters and Public Cemetery at Akaroa. It is separated from the Roman Catholic Cemetery which is illustrated on the front page of this slide show. The Anglican Cemetery is a completely different cemetery and is located some distance away.
What cemeteries can tell us today

For many people cemeteries were much more than places where the dead were buried.

They were places where people could keep in touch with, talk to or continue to look after those who they had cared for in life.

They became places where people could erect monuments that told of religious piety, status in the community, good works and affiliations.

Family graves provide information about the individuals, their families, lifespan, sometimes even their occupations, achievements in life and circumstances of death.

These memorials are social documents. They are primary historical sources which reveal much about the events and living conditions in the past, but also give us clues about taste, fashion and communal values.
What is a Plot 1?

A plot is a small piece of land bought by an individual or family for the purpose of burying family members when they died.

Plots varied in size and were sold in classes. Those with the best views were often large family sized plots and were sold as Class 1 plots. People were allowed to erect a tall monument on these plots and fence them.

These examples are small plots, each fenced with a beautiful iron fence.
What is a Plot 2?

Class two plots were in less favourable positions but were often quite large. People buying these plots were usually not allowed to erect anything over a couple of feet in height. People buying class 2 plots usually marked the grave with a simple nameplate and low concrete wall surround.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Costs</th>
<th>1st Class</th>
<th>2nd Class</th>
<th>3rd Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>£3.0.0</td>
<td>£2.17.6</td>
<td>12s.6d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>£3.0.0</td>
<td>£2.7.6</td>
<td>£1.2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Class three plots were in the least favourable parts of the cemetery and did not usually have a stone or other permanent grave marker on the grave.

Paupers graves were in an area set aside for those who could not afford to purchase a plot.
What is on a headstone?

This style of headstone is called a capped stone. This style of headstone is quite old.

1. Most headstones have a decoration or ornament that has meaning for the living and the deceased. This stele has a wreath. The circle shape of the wreath represents eternity and memory.

2. This stone inserted into the headstone is called a ledger and contains the inscription or epitaph. Only some headstones have an inserted ledger of a different stone.

3. All headstones have an inscription of some sort that will include names of those commemorated, age and date of death.

4. The base stone is called the plinth and protects the more expensive headstone material from ground moisture. Some headstones have several plinths.
Reading an Inscription

The inscription or epitaph usually begins with the words “Sacred to the memory of” or “In loving Memory of”

Inscriptions always include who is buried or commemorated as well as date of death and age at death.

Sometimes many family members are shown on the inscription.

Sometimes inscriptions will include other information such as an accidental death, person’s occupation, affiliations or war involvement.

Not all the names listed on an inscription may be buried in the plot.

Samuel Gourley was killed in the South African War in 1900.
Pedestal type headstones were very popular because quite a lot of information could be recorded on the four sides of a pedestal.

Take care when you are recording inscriptions from a pedestal and make sure that you look around all four sides of the base.

Very interesting information can sometimes be recorded on the side of a pedestal and it is easy to miss it.

In this example the death of three children are recorded on the side of the pedestal.
Reading an inscription can be tricky

You often have to read very carefully to work out who has died and you can sometimes be easily fooled.

Look carefully at these epitaphs. How many people have died in each of these cases and according to the headstones?

Who is actually buried in these two examples?
Reading an inscription can be tricky.

On many heritage tombstones it can be hard to work out what a wife’s name is.

What is Clara’s full name in the example on the left?

In the example below Margaret Nicholson is James Taylor’s wife. Why do you think she is called Nicholson on the tombstone?

If you were going to try and find out more about Margaret Nicholson what name would you use to search for her in the cemetery records?
Reading an inscription can be tricky.

On many heritage tombstones it can be hard to work out what age someone is when they died.

Most usually the date of death and age are recorded as in the Margaret Nicholson example below.

But sometimes the date of birth and the date of death are recorded and you have to work out the age. Take a calculator to the cemetery with you. How old was Clara when she died?
Using inscription information

We can find out much more about an accident if we use the inscription information to look up the newspapers of the time. Click on the link, http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=q&e=-----en-1----0-all

search using the name and limit the search to the accident date on the headstone and add extra time as a finish date as newspapers were not always printed every day. Here is more information:

A sad accident occurred near the heads on the 26th at 3.3 o’clock by which Nicholas Swan, 22 years of age, a resident of Dunedin, lost his life. Swan, with two other young men, was going off in a dingey to the yacht Pera, anchored off Hobart Town Point, when, in a sudden squall, the dingey swamped. Some fishermen, who saw the accident, rescued two of the men, but nothing could be seen of Swan. The police, under Sergeant Geerin, tried to recover the body in the evening by means of drags, but they were unsuccessful.

The article on the right is a portion of an article from the Otago Witness called Casualties published 4 Jan 1900 and obtained from http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/
We can find out much more about a war death if we use the inscription information to look up the Commonwealth War Grave Commission website.

Click on the link,  
http://www.cwgc.org/debt_of Honour.asp?menuid=14 
and type the information from the inscription that is needed to search the CWGC database.

We can also find out different information by searching for David Swan on the Auckland Museum Centotaph database at  
http://muse.aucklandmuseum.com/databases/Cenotaph/locations.aspx

This is a rewarding search as the information contains a photograph of David Swan and his embarkation records.
Enjoy your cemetery visit but remember...

Dress appropriately for the visit. Solid lace-up footwear for uneven and often steep surfaces is necessary. Warm coats, raincoats and sunhats are advisable.

Take a rubbish bag with you. There are no rubbish receptacles at most cemeteries. Make sure that everything you take into the cemetery you also take away with you. Don’t leave litter.

Keep with your group. Do not wander off by yourself.

Move around the cemetery on the sealed and grass paths. Do not run across what appear to be empty spaces. Many plots do not have headstones or other markers but people are buried there.

Never move a gravestone or plot fencing.

Do not sit on, lean against, push against, or try to climb headstones.
Enjoy your cemetery visit but remember...

Do not scratch at or try to clean headstones. If you have a water bottle with you, you can wet the headstone to make it easier to read and photograph.

No crayon or pencil rubbings of headstones are allowed.

You may need to walk over a grave to better read an inscription. Please do this with respect.

Be mindful of other visitors in the cemetery. A cemetery is a special place for many visitors who come to pay their respects to deceased relatives. To show respect for the thoughts and feelings of others by behaving quietly is important.

IMPORTANT
Not all cemeteries are closed to burials. If you arrive to find a burial service in progress you will need to move away to another part of the cemetery until the service is over.