FAUNA AND FLORA SYMBOLS

A presentation to be to introduce students to some of the symbols we see in heritage cemeteries and the meaning of these symbols to those living in Victorian and Edwardian times.
Lamb at Rest

- The Lamb is often used in the Bible and in prayer as a symbol for Jesus as in the rosary prayer “Lamb of God, take away the sins of the world. Grant us peace.”

- In the Bible, Jesus is also called the ‘The Good Shepherd.’ The people of God are His sheep and are in His care.

- Lambs on cemetery headstones are commonly used for the death of children. The example on the lower left, bears the simple inscription ‘Little Mary’.
Here a lamb is carrying a flag. Banners also called standards were once carried into battle for victory.

The lamb carrying the standard symbolises the resurrection and offers the promise of life after death or victory over death.
The dove is found, sometimes at rest, sometimes flying and nearly always has an olive branch in its beak.

The story in Genesis, the first chapter of the Bible tells of Noah sending forth the Dove which returns with an olive branch.

The Dove is a symbol of purity and peace and also a symbol of the holy ghost.
The Dove of Peace and the Gates of Heaven

- The roses represent the shortness of life.
- The dove of peace represents the soul leaving for heaven.
- The open gates signify that the soul has passed through gates of heaven and beyond to peace, paradise and eternal life.
- In a variation on this design, the dove is replaced with an anchor.
**Passion Flower**

- The different parts of the unusual flower of the passionfruit plant were interpreted by Victorians to symbolise the crucifixion and the suffering of Christ.

- The central column of the flower represents the pillar to which Jesus was tied to be scourged or whipped. The thread like inner petals represent the crown of thorns, the five yellow stamens symbolise the five wounds of Christ and the three pink styles the nails. The ten outer petals symbolise the ten faithful apostles.

- The passionflower is a symbol of faith and belief that Christ, through his suffering, was sent to save us.
The lily, is said to have been originally created by the tears of Eve as she was expelled from the Garden of Eden.

The whiteness and fragrance of the lily is a symbol for both the Virgin Mary (Mother of Jesus) and others who are pure in heart and who have led blameless lives.

Lilies are the traditional Victorian flower of death and mourning.
Lily of the Valley

- The lily of the valley is one of the first flowers to bloom in the spring.

- The presence of lily of the valley on a tombstone symbolises renewal and resurrection, and a return of happiness, purity and humility.
Convolvulus & Ivy

Flora

- Convolvulus is also known as bindweed because it entwines itself around a support and was a popular symbol of attachment and affection. The Convolvulus flower closes at night and opens again with the morning sun and is also symbolic of the resurrection, youth, the bonds of love and the brevity of life.

- Vines such as convolvulus and ivy are motifs commonly used on headstones.

- Ivy is an evergreen plant, and extremely hardy. It is associated with immortality and fidelity. Like bindweed it clings to a support and is symbolic of the ties that bind, friendship and undying affection. The three pointed leaves also represent the Trinity.
Olive Leaves and Branches

- The olive is representative of the symbol of peace and is commonly associated with the dove.
- The olive tree is frequently mentioned in the bible and often features on cemetery headstones as a decoration separate from the dove but in association with other symbolic motifs.
- The olive signifies fruitfulness, purification, strength and victory. In these examples the olive is associated with the cypress (meaning longevity, resurrection, immortality) and the oak (strength, endurance, eternity) and the Glory Cross.
Broken flowers usually denote a life cut short and were often used as a symbol for the death of a child.

The broken lily (right) is the symbol used on the Fogo memorial in the Northern Cemetery in Dunedin. The Fogo family had two lives cut short. The Fogo’s young son died in 1875 aged 11 months. Twenty-five years later Sarah Fogo was convicted of killing her abusive husband and spent 11 years in gaol for the crime. She died at age 70 and was interred in this plot with her husband and baby son. The headstone probably dates from around 1875.
Thistle

- In Scotland a species of thistle (Onopordum acanthium) is honoured as a national symbol.

- When invading Vikings, under the cover of darkness, decided to remove their shoes for extra stealth. When one of them stood on a thistle, his cry alerted the Scots and they defeated the Danes in the ensuing battle.

- While the thistle is symbol of all things Scottish it is also associated with earthly sorrow. The thorns symbolise the crown of thorns worn by Jesus during the crucifixion of Christ.
The shamrock is often proudly displayed on memorials of those of Irish descent.

The leaf was first used by St Patrick to illustrate the Christian idea of the Holy Trinity – the father, the son and the holy ghost.

The plant most widely considered to represent the traditional Shamrock is a plant called *Trifolium dubium* (the lesser clover) known to the Irish as *seamuir bhui*. 
The rose has been a much-loved flower for many thousands of years and is a very popular symbol in the cemetery.

For Christians the red rose was a symbol of martyrdom, and the white rose a symbol of purity.

In Christian mythology the rose in the Garden of Eden did not have thorns, but acquired them on earth to remind man of Adam and Eve’s original sin. In Victorian and Edwardian cemeteries the rose can often be found on the graves of women and without thorns.

The rose is also the national emblem of England and was often used on headstones with this meaning in mind.
**THE FERN**

- The fern is a very common symbol found on headstones in New Zealand as it was adopted as the symbol of remembrance for New Zealand soldiers who served and died in the Great War (The NZEF) and later those men who served and died in the NZ Army in the Second World War (The 2nd NZEF).

- The fern, a ground plant that grows in the shady recesses of the forest, symbolises the human virtues of humility, frankness and sincerity.
Acanthus Leaves

- Acanthus leaves are used as a decorative feature.
- They are often used as a decoration under the capstone for pillars on buildings.
- They are also used in cemetery memorials and often appear along the top of a headstone resembling a line of snails.
- It is said that whoever wears the leaves or has them decorating their tomb has overcome Adam and Eve’s curse referred to in the book of Genesis.
The palm leaf is often used as a geometric decoration on capstones and edgings for classical style monuments.

The palm symbolises victory.
Grape designs are very commonly found and represent the fruits of the kingdom of heaven, which the deceased is enjoying.

Grape designs often feature in combination with other designs. Grapes can also feature as a clinging vine motif.
Tree of Life

- Headstones representing tree trunks and cut branches with ivy are quite common.
- A tree trunk devoid of branches and canopy is symbolic of a life well lived by a much respected person and perhaps cut short at a young age.
- The tree of life headstone is symbolic of a family of several generations that branch off as branches on a tree.