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# Historical Records or Archaeological Facts? The Withells Road Cemetery

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## ABSTRACT

It is not often that archaeologists have the opportunity of checking data obtained from their excavations against recorded facts. The nineteenth century burial ground at Withells Road, Christchurch, provided such an opportunity, but the results were not entirely as expected. In this case, the archaeological evidence is believed to provide a more accurate record than the available historical documentation.

*Keywords:* HISTORIC, CEMETERY, BURIALS

## INTRODUCTION

Because of the incompleteness of written records and the lack of accordance in local oral traditions, archaeological methods were used in 1981 to locate and exhume a number of historic period burials from a disused Wesleyan (Methodist) graveyard at Withells Road, Christchurch. The owners of the land in which the burials were situated wished to sell it for residential development, but were required to remove any known human remains from it before doing so.

The graveyard was believed not to have been used for human burials since the end of the nineteenth century. In recent years, it had been cleared of surface evidence and used for horticulture, although it was still owned by the Methodist Church.

No record existed of how many people had been buried or exactly where the graves were. There was considerable discrepancy in the information supplied by people who could remember seeing gravestones standing in position. This discrepancy, which mainly concerned the location of the graves, was due principally to the growth of trees and to the number of residential buildings and fences that had been erected around the area, greatly modifying the landscape.

Before any investigation, the most general belief by both Church authorities and local residents was that there were four graves in the thousand-square-metre section of land, a belief supported, and doubtless fostered, by the four names on three gravestones piled in the north-west corner of the site.

## HISTORY

In July 1855 one Thomas Stubbs, a resident of Riccarton, Christchurch, received a Crown grant of fifty acres (about twenty hectares) with a frontage on what is now called Withells Road, for which he paid £150. In August 1861 Stubbs donated one acre of this land to the Wesleyan Church. A chapel was opened here in October 1861 (*Lyttelton Times*, 19 October

1861), but ten years later, in 1871, a new church was erected nearby in another part of the district, and three quarters of the original section was sold, only a quarter of an acre being retained by the church with a right-of-way on to Withells Road (Loach 1970.)

Apart from various legal transactions, little is known of the subsequent history of that quarter acre of land; a 1955 surveyor's notebook refers to gorse and broom on the site with pine trees and stumps on the boundary (John Palmer, Department of Lands and Survey, pers. comm. 1981). In 1970 a newspaper report on Masham, as the district was known for a time, described the site as "a forgotten cemetery, hidden behind broom" and referred to three fallen headstones recording the names of Charles Boon, Mary Reeve, and two sisters, Lillian and Helen Cannon (Gale 1970). Research of historical records, principally newspapers and church files, undertaken about this time by Cyril Loach of the Canterbury Regional Committee of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust, initially indicated that up to seven people had been buried in the graveyard—five adults and two children (Loach 1970). Local informants said that the land had been used for commercial berry production for a time, and the disturbed nature of the top soil, as was later revealed by excavation, was consistent with it having been cultivated.

In 1975 the "burial ground" status of the graveyard was removed (under the Burial and Cremation Act 1964, 1979) at the request of the Methodist Church, and the Canterbury Museum was asked to locate the graves using archaeological methods. At this time the three gravestones were lying in the north-west corner of the site, and were associated with a type of concrete block not used in the nineteenth century. It appeared as though the stones had been re-erected, along with a concrete block structure, some time during the past few decades, but this had subsequently collapsed or been demolished. Because of its age the graveyard was recorded in the New Zealand Archaeological Association files as site S84/168.

Initially, test holes at three metre intervals were dug over the burial ground area to examine the subsurface stratigraphy. These showed a disturbed topsoil and an extremely variable subsoil, but no obvious indication of grave locations. At this time, too, a proton magnetometer was used in the hope of identifying ground disturbances or metal parts of coffins, but again no clear picture emerged. This was followed up with a series of fifty-centimetre-wide parallel trenches dug mechanically at nominal 1.5 metre intervals to a depth of one metre across the section, so that any graves cut by the trenches could be seen as stratigraphic intrusions in the vertical sides. Although no specific study was made of nineteenth century burial customs, on the basis of present day tradition we expected the graves to be up to two metres long and 1.8 metres deep, and we were informed by a representative of the church that the burials would probably have been oriented roughly east-west. The trenches were therefore run approximately north-south, parallel to the long axis of the section, with 1.5 metre spacing so as to intersect any graves; this spacing was chosen for reasons of economy and so as to leave a sufficiently wide baulk for spoil. Although local information favoured burials being located on the eastern side of the site (closest to where the church had been situated), the trenches were commenced on the opposite side where the gravestones had been piled, as it seemed unlikely that they would have been shifted any further than necessary to clear the ground for cultivation. The trenching proved successful in locating a number of grave intrusions, and once found their positions were recorded on a plan of the site.

The graves were then left intact until the Church fulfilled the legal requirements necessary before human remains could be lifted.

Meanwhile, further documentary research, this time of death registrations, brought Loach's record of people he thought had been buried in the graveyard up to nine (Loach 1980). These were:

1876	Richard Potts,	aged 87 years
1877	Jane Corlett,	aged 71 years
1880	Stephen Corlett,	aged 75 years
1881	Rebecca Southon,	aged 40 years
1881	George Southon,	aged 6 weeks
1882	Charles Boon,	aged 46 years
1884	Lillian Cannon,	aged 11 months
1887	Helen Cannon,	aged 6 years
1894	Mary Reeve,	aged 24 years

A special Parliamentary Act empowering the Church to remove the remains of bodies was passed in 1981 and, as required by law, permission was obtained from the Department of Health and from the New Zealand Historic Places Trust (Permit 1981/23; Authority 1981/36). At the end of 1981 a team of ten volunteers under our direction excavated the remains.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS

When we came to excavate the site in 1981, the overburden to the approximate upper level of the remains of coffins (where present) was removed mechanically from the whole of that part of the site where evidence of graves had been located. The excavation and removal of burial remains was then carried out by hand, and recorded by measurement and photography. During the two week period that the excavations were being carried out by the team of volunteers, it was necessary to keep a continuous guard on the site to prevent disturbance by curiosity seekers attracted by unwanted media publicity.

There were thirteen graves in two parallel rows of nine and four respectively (these have been numbered consecutively in Figure 1). Two of them were empty; if bodies had been placed in them, they had been removed without leaving any remains or organic stains such as were found in the others. The other eleven contained the remains of twelve humans, remnants of coffins, a presumed foetus and a dog. These were taken back to the Canterbury Museum for study. Besides the thirteen graves referred to above there were several small shallow intrusions containing household and other rubbish. To ensure that smaller graves or any with a different orientation had not been missed, a further series of parallel trenches was dug across the section at right angles to the first after the remains had been lifted.

During the course of the excavations Cyril Loach speculated about the possibility that two other people, not on his 1980 list, had been buried at Withells Road (Loach 1981). These were:

1883	Jane Stubbs,	aged 66 [56?] years
1883	Thomas Stubbs,	aged 70 years

the latter being the original donor of the land to the Methodist Church.

## CONTENTS OF THE GRAVES

With the exception of number 11, all the adult burials were nearly the traditional "six feet deep", averaging 1.77 metres (5.8 feet) from the present surface to the base of the pit, or 1.5 metres to the top of the coffin. Children's graves were shallower than adults', being 1.25 to 1.33 metres from the surface to the top of the coffin. As far as could be determined the coffins were of conventional European shape for that period.

The graves were oriented approximately east-west, aligned with the short sides of the parallelogram-shaped site (288°; see Figure 1). All those human skeletons that were sufficiently well preserved to determine which way they lay had the head to the west and the feet to the east (towards where the chapel had stood until 1871), and most lay face up.

As no physical anthropologist was available in the time allowed by the authorities, assessments of the skeletal material were carried out by one of the present authors who had had considerable experience in this field. The age and sex of these skeletons were estimated from standard skeletal criteria (such as given in Brothwell 1963, Cornwall 1956, Simpson 1974, and McKern 1970) together with more general indications provided by the bones, hair (where present), and the remains of clothing. Such estimates were made even when, in the case of two of the burials, the name and age at death could be read on remnants of the coffins. Only the principal standard criteria that were used in the estimations are given below. Where possible, long bone measurements were taken of the adult skeletons for the estimation of stature. Although the use of up to 27 different formulae gave a range of height estimates, only results based on the femur and tibia and using American equations (Trotter 1970) are given here. Our later discussion on discrepancies between historical and archaeological evidence does not depend on very close assessments of the age and physical characteristics of the individuals found.

### GRAVE 1

A disturbed burial with a twentieth-century concrete block in the fill. It contained a decayed wooden coffin with a cloth lining or shroud, and the remains of a skeleton (partial skull, upper vertebrae, and ribs) of a child estimated to be about six or seven years old from tooth eruption and skeletal development. There was a small button at the back of the neck. This body had been buried lying on its right side.

Local inhabitants told us that children had dug into this grave and found bones about 1975. This was doubtless the cause of the disturbance and would account for the missing bones of the skeleton, and for the anomalous presence of the concrete block. There is no suggestion of a twentieth century age for the burial.

A possible identification of this burial (from the recorded burials listed above from Loach 1980) is that of Helen Cannon, aged six. If so it is a little surprising that her sister Lillian, who died at 11 months some three years earlier, and who is recorded on the same headstone (which was lying in the corner of the site), was not buried nearby. However, the only alternative found for Helen Cannon was in Grave 10, which was also some distance from the possible grave of Lillian Cannon (Grave 13). It might have been assumed, from the double inscription on the headstone, that both children had been buried in the same grave but this does not appear to have been the case.

## GRAVE 2

Contained the remains of a wooden coffin which though badly decayed had retained a well defined shape, 1.81 m long and 260–280 mm high. There was some composition material on the bottom and at the bends of the sides. The sides were nailed to the bottom at 200 mm intervals, and there was a metal plaque on the lid which bore the painted legend: "Abraham Stubbs Aged 30 years 1862". Top soil and silt had been packed around the coffin, which contained a skeleton, the skull of which had been cut open. Although the masculine morphology of the pelvis, skull, femur and mandible was consistent with the sex indicated by the name on the coffin lid, other skeletal indications actually suggested an age of over 40 years. However, there was abnormal fusion of the bones (sacrum to pelvis, for example) which gave a false impression of age. Tooth eruption and wear were more in keeping with an age of 30–40 years. His height was estimated as about 166 cm.

Subsequent research showed that Abraham Stubbs had drowned in the River Avon, Christchurch, in August 1862 (*Lyttelton Times*, 10 September 1862), and there was suspicion of foul play, hence a post mortem operation was carried out. (One version of the *Lyttelton Times* for 8 October 1862 makes it unclear whether or not it was a case of murder, but another version of the same date states that the man held in custody on suspicion of murder was released by the magistrate.) The official 1870 return of drowned persons (House of Representatives, 1870) gives the date of Stubbs' drowning as 1863, but this is clearly in error. Abraham Stubbs was the brother of the first person to obtain title to the land, Thomas Stubbs (*Lyttelton Times*, 1 October 1862), and his burial here explains why the quarter-acre section was retained by the church when the rest was sold off in 1871. Before the archaeological excavation it was not known why this section had been retained, as there was no known record of its use as a burial ground before 1876.

## GRAVE 3

Contained a decayed coffin, the sides of which were made of two layers of wood; a metal patch tacked on to the outside of the inner layer was covered by the outer. It was lined inside and covered outside with cloth, and had patterned tin edging and straps on the outside. There were three metal handles on each side and one at each end. Two large stones had been placed beneath the coffin about the area of the shoulders.

In the coffin was the skeleton of a male (based on pelvis, sternum, skull, and femur morphology, although the skull and femur indications were marginal). An age of about 30 years was estimated from the teeth, the sternum, and from skull sutures, and the height was about 161 cm. There was a button at the base of the neck.

## GRAVE 4

Although stratigraphic intrusion showed that an adult grave of similar size and shape to the others had been dug, there were no remains or organic stains in it. Either no body had been buried here, or if one had been buried, it had been removed before the onset of decay.

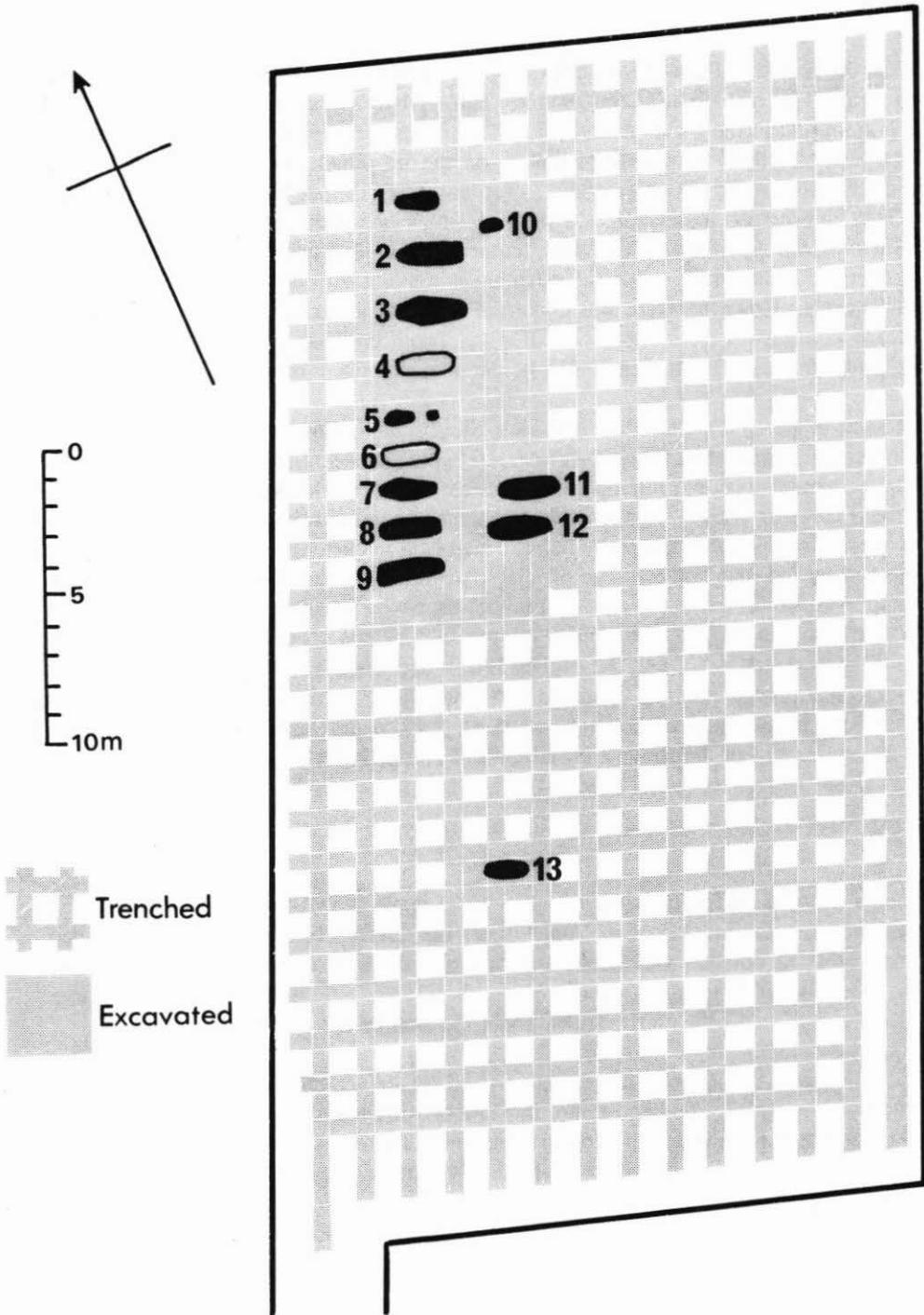


Figure 1: Plan of the Withells Road cemetery, Christchurch.

#### GRAVE 5

- (a) A stain of decayed wood, some putty, and remnants of nails (from the lid) and screws (from the bottom) indicated a collapsed 610-mm-long coffin. A single bone was identified as coming from an infant less than six months old.
- (b) To the east of 5a and at a slightly greater depth were the remains of a cloth-lined wooden box, probably cube shaped, with about 23 cm sides. Apart from organic stains there were no recognizable contents, but it is suggested that this box may have contained a foetus. It seems likely that even if full records were available a foetus would not have been listed, as its interment was probably unofficial; we cannot think of any other likely explanation for a coffin-like box being buried here.

#### GRAVE 6

This was indicated by stratigraphic intrusion, but contained no cultural or human remains; similar to Grave 4.

#### GRAVE 7

Contained a decayed wooden coffin with cloth lining, with tin edging embossed with a sub-circular pattern, and iron sheet on the lid; it had four iron handles. In it was the skeleton of a male (based on pelvis, sternum, skull and femur morphology), aged 30–35 years from the evidence of tooth wear, palatal suture, and parietal sutures. He had been about 165 cm tall. The right hand was clenched on the right hip and the left was probably similarly positioned.

#### GRAVE 8

Contained a badly decayed wooden coffin with eight iron handles. The painted words: "Richard Potts Died Feb 1876 Aged 87" on a shield-shaped metal plaque on the lid were consistent with the contents, which were the remains of an aged male, 177 cm long, cramped to fit into the coffin which was too short for his body. Sex was confirmed from pelvis, sternum, skull and femur morphology. The condition of the mandible, one remaining tooth at the time of death, fused palate, skull sutures, and general degenerative bone condition indicated an age of over 60 years. There was a button at the base of the neck and another on the clavicle.

There can be little reason to doubt that these remains were in fact those of Richard Potts; Loach's research had indicated he was buried here, even though his name is inscribed with correct age and date of death on a gravestone in the Addington Cemetery, six and a half kilometres away from Withells Road (Fig. 2).

#### GRAVE 9

There was the butt of a 75 by 90 mm wooden post with a 100 mm square footing at the head of the grave, 25 to 48 cm below ground level. This was possibly the remains of a wooden cross which had once marked the burial.

The grave contained two decayed wooden coffins, a small one (b) associated with a fragmentary infant skull lying on top of a full sized one (a). Both were lined with cloth and had decorative tin edging and straps. The large coffin had two-layer wooden walls, a pitch lined bottom, eight handles, and a large piece of sheet iron and a small plaque on the lid, the latter being at the head end. The small coffin had a shield-shaped and a heart-shaped plaque.

The large coffin (a) contained the skeleton of a female (based on pelvis, skull and femur morphology). The teeth were badly worn and there was a calcareous growth inside the skull. Her age was estimated as 40 years from her teeth and skull sutures, and her height as 161 cm. There was a button at the right shoulder.

Skull fragments that were identified as coming from an infant under six months old lay just outside the decayed western end of the small coffin (b).

It is likely that these were the graves of Rebecca Southon, aged 40, who died of septicaemia in childbirth, and her infant son, who died six weeks later (Loach 1980).

#### GRAVE 10

The remains of a child about five years old (based on tooth eruption) were found in a small decayed wooden coffin, with cloth lining and tin edging. The depth from the surface to the top of the coffin was 1.33 m.

This is an alternative site to Grave 1 for the burial of Helen Cannon, aged six years; age determination from the skeletal remains is not accurate enough to differentiate between five and six years of age.

#### GRAVE 11

Contained a cloth-lined wooden coffin with tin edging; sheet iron on the lid had indented patterning, and there were eight iron handles. The bottom and part of the sides of the coffin had been lined with pitch. Doubtless because of a hard-pan in the soil at a depth of 1.5 m, this grave was shallower than usual for an adult; the top of the coffin was 1.25 m below the surface.

In the coffin was the skeleton of a male (based on pelvis, sternum, skull and femur morphology), aged about 50 years from teeth, skull sutures, sternum and palate. His height was about 169 cm. There was an unfused metopic suture in the skull. There were buttons on the chest, the right wrist, and in the pelvic region.

This was probably the grave of Charles Boon who died in 1882 aged 46, and whose burial is recorded on one of the gravestones that were in the corner of the burial ground.

#### GRAVE 12

- (a) Contained a wooden coffin with sheet iron ornamentation on the top and elaborate tin edging coloured green with pink roses. In it was the skeleton of a woman (based on pelvis, skull, mandible and femur morphology, and hair style), aged about 30 years from teeth and skull sutures; her hands were by her sides. She had an estimated height of 162 cm. The bones were in poor condition (very wet) but the hair was very well preserved—abundant gold-blond in plaits on top of the head and a plaited coil at the back. Hair pins and remnants of ribbons were present. The teeth had excessive wear and caries.



*Figure 2:* The headstone for Richard Potts stands in the Addington Cemetery, over 6 km from where he was buried at Withells Road. His remains have now been reinterred in the Avonhead Park Cemetery.

- (b) At a shallower depth above the coffin were the bones of a small dog which had been buried at a later date.

This may well have been the grave of Mary Reeve, aged 24 (a daughter of Charles Boon). The greater age estimated from the skeletal remains could be a result of ill health which is suggested by the condition of her teeth and by a verse on her headstone which reads in part: "Her pain is o'er, she's found release". A later family photograph held by the Canterbury Museum includes a fox terrier, and it may be no coincidence that the dog bones found buried above her coffin are of a size consistent with this breed.

## GRAVE 13

A very badly decayed small coffin, somewhat isolated from the rest, contained the remains of an infant aged 12-18 months (judged from tooth eruption and metopic suture). Some hair remained on the skull.

This could possibly be the grave of Lillian Cannon, aged 11 months, although if so, it is surprising that it is so far from that of her sister if the latter were buried in either Graves 1 or 10.

## SUMMARY

There are some obvious discrepancies between what was found and the possible burials listed by Loach (1980, 1981). Four of the people assumed by Loach to have been buried here were definitely not present, and there were five others (six if the presumed foetus is included) for whom there was no record. To some extent this is doubtless because no burial-ground or church records were available. The results of the excavation, including our estimates of age based on skeletal indications, may be summarised as follows:

Grave 1	Child, 6-7 years	[possibly Helen Cannon, 6]
Grave 2	Male, 30-45 years	[Abraham Stubbs, 30]
Grave 3	Male, c.30 years	[Unidentified]
Grave 4	Empty	
Grave 5a	Infant, <6 months	[Unidentified]
Grave 5b	Presumed foetus	
Grave 6	Empty	
Grave 7	Male, 30-35 years	[Unidentified]
Grave 8	Male, >60 years	[Richard Potts, 87]
Grave 9a	Female, c.40 years	[probably Rebecca Southon, 40]
Grave 9b	Infant, <6 months	[probably George Southon, 6 weeks]
Grave 10	Child, c.5 years	[possibly Helen Cannon, 6]
Grave 11	Male, 40-50 years	[probably Charles Boon, 46]
Grave 12a	Female, c.30 years	[probably Mary Reeve, 24]
Grave 12b	Dog	
Grave 13	Infant, 12-18 months	[possibly Lillian Cannon, 11 months]

Although there is a decided limit to the accuracy of skeletal age and sex estimates, the range of error is not sufficient to allow any of the unidentified remains to belong to either of the much older Corletts or Stubbs as was suggested by Loach (1980, 1981). All appropriate authorities were advised that the remains we found did not correspond with those he suggested had been buried there, and a plea was made not to rebury them until more work had been done on identifying them (Trotter 1982), but we were requested to return them for reburial. Nor were those people, such as the descendants of the Corletts, who had been advised of impending reinterment on the basis of Loach's list, told that the remains were not there.

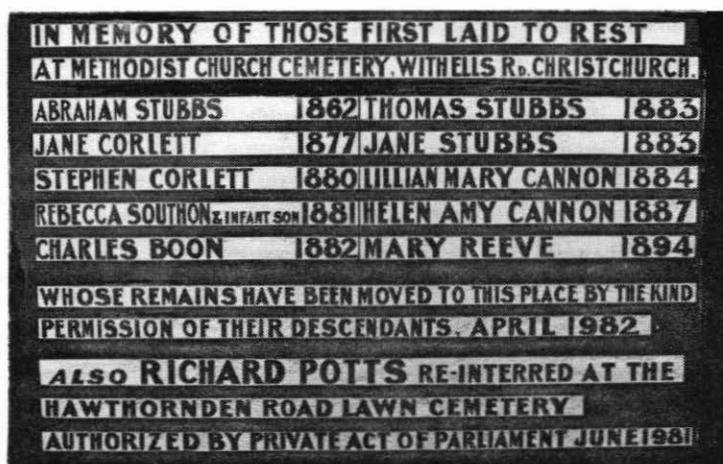


Figure 3: The inscription over the new grave at Waimairi Cemetery where most of the Withells Road burials were reinterred. Neither the Corletts nor the Stubbs were in fact buried here, and several people whose remains were not identified are not mentioned.

## REINTERMENT

At the beginning of 1982 the remains of Richard Potts were reburied in the new Avonhead Park lawn cemetery in Hawthornden Road, Christchurch, at the request of his descendants (his headstone is still in the Addington Cemetery on the other side of town). The rest were reinterred with a common headstone in the Waimairi Cemetery (Fig. 3). The headstone is lettered:

IN MEMORY OF THOSE FIRST LAID TO REST  
 AT METHODIST CHURCH CEMETERY, WITHELLS Rd. CHRISTCHURCH.

ABRAHAM STUBBS	1862	THOMAS STUBBS	1883
JANE CORLETT	1877	JANE STUBBS	1883
STEPHEN CORLETT	1880	LILLIAN MARY CANNON	1884
REBECCA SOUTHON & infant son	1881	HELEN AMY CANNON	1887
CHARLES BOON	1882	MARY REEVE	1894

WHOSE REMAINS HAVE BEEN REMOVED TO THIS PLACE BY THE KIND  
 PERMISSION OF THEIR DESCENDANTS, APRIL 1982  
 also RICHARD POTTS RE-INTERRED AT THE  
 HAWTHORNDEN ROAD LAWN CEMETERY  
 AUTHORIZED BY PRIVATE ACT OF PARLIAMENT JUNE 1981

We had suspected that the Corletts' names might be recorded on the new headstone, even although they were not present, but it was a considerable surprise to find the two 1883 Stubbs' names. Not only were they not present amongst those excavated from Withells Road, but it had not occurred to us that the 1981 newspaper suggestion would be taken seriously. Jane and Thomas Stubbs were probably aged 56 and 70 respectively at the time of their deaths in 1883, and just as there were no remains excavated that could possibly be the Corletts, nor were there any that could be the Stubbs. (There is clearly at least one error in the death registrations and newspaper notices relating to the Corletts and Stubbs. Jane Stubbs was the Corletts' eldest daughter, but an age of 66 as recorded at the time of her death would have her born eight years before her parents' marriage in 1825—when they were only eleven and twelve years old. An examination of the available records suggests a ten year error and that she was most likely only 56 years old when she died. This does not, however, affect our findings about the Withells Road burials.)

The old Withells Road headstone recording the burial of Charles Boon was inscribed with a record of his reinterment at Waimairi and placed on his wife's grave in the Yaldhurst Cemetery, where his family is also buried (Fig. 4). Our suggestion that his bones also be buried at Yaldhurst was not acted upon, although the cemetery is still in use. The other two Withells Road headstones were buried in the new common grave in the Waimairi Cemetery. The old graveyard site was then sold and residential buildings erected on it.

## DISCUSSION

At the time we undertook to locate and raise the Withells Road burials, it was on the understanding that funds would be made available (after the sale of the cleared property) for a full investigation, both to identify the individuals and to obtain information on this sample of a nineteenth century European population. This proved not to be the case, and indeed we were requested to return the remains for reburial as soon as possible. (This matter has been referred to elsewhere by Trotter, 1984: 6.)

The loss of potential information on the health, the burial customs, and other aspects of the people was disappointing, but the experience emphasised some interesting aspects of today's society. It was apparently acceptable, for instance, to produce food commercially on a disused graveyard, but not acceptable to live on it. (Legally the matter is probably reduced to the difference between lease and sale, but the effect remains the same. Cf. Polson and Marshall 1975.) More puzzling was the attitude that there was little need to make any serious attempt to identify the unnamed people whom we found in the section, although some trouble was taken to contact representatives of the descendants of people *thought* to have been buried there (whether they were or not). Of most interest—and of pertinence for future historians—is that the new headstone erected over the reinterred remains at the Waimairi Cemetery records the reinterment of Jane and Stephen Corlett and Jane and Thomas Stubbs, none of whom was found at Withells Road, and certainly none of whom have been reburied at Waimairi. It also fails to record that unidentified remains were reinterred in this grave.

While the present investigators accept that lack of documentation causes some confusion over death records of last century, it is unfortunate that such confusion should be compounded this century by the inaccuracy of the headstone information at Waimairi. At present we do not know where the Corletts' and Stubbs' remains are, but it is not



Figure 4: Charles Boon's headstone, originally at Withells Road, now lies on his wife's grave at Yaldhurst. His remains have been reinterred at Waimairi.

inconceivable that they will some day be located either through documentary research or excavation.

One of the main problems in determining whether or not certain people were buried in the Withells Road cemetery was the use of the place name "Riccarton" in newspaper notices and death registrations.

The cemetery and the 1861 church referred to in this paper as "Withells Road", as well as the replacement 1871 church built nearby, were, in the past, called both "Masham" and "Upper Riccarton" (see, for example, Morley 1900: 427). The register of death records for people we know with a reasonable degree of certainty *were* buried in the Withells Road cemetery, refers to their place of interment variously as "Riccarton", "Wesleyan Cemetery, Riccarton" and "Yaldhurst Wesleyan Cemetery". (This latter is quite certainly our 'Withells Road', and should not be confused with the Yaldhurst Cemetery referred to earlier as the burial place of Charles Boon's wife, which is still in use.) In 1886 yet another Methodist church was built about two kilometres away opposite St Peters Anglican Church at what was then called "Riccarton Village" (a locality nowadays known as "Church Corner"). Until 1940 this church was officially known as the "Riccarton Village" Methodist Church.

The burial records and newspaper reports for the problematical Corletts' and Stubbs' interments were amongst those that stated simply that the burial place was at "Riccarton". There was, to our knowledge, no cemetery attached to the "Riccarton Village" Methodist Church, and its erection in any case post-dates their deaths, so it was logical to assume that these known followers of Methodism were buried at the "Upper Riccarton" (Withells Road) cemetery—and indeed, such were apparently the conclusions of both Loach (1970, 1980, 1981) and the church authorities, before the excavation of the human remains from the Withells Road cemetery. (This was supported by the fact that three of the people whose headstones were still extant at Withells Road were among those simply recorded as having been buried at "Riccarton".) Faced with the indisputable fact that neither the Corletts' nor the Stubbs' remains were recovered from the land cleared, it is necessary to look at alternatives.

One is that they were interred somewhere outside the 1981 boundaries of the cemetery section, but this seems unlikely. Although Eliza Withell, nee Corlett, records that half, rather than quarter, of an acre of land was set aside for a burial ground (Withell 1924), this is not supported by the 1872 land transfer records. Had it been the case, then it is possible that part of the original cemetery could at some time have become incorporated into the surrounding residential sections.

The second possibility is that they were buried in the large cemetery at St Peters Anglican Church, Riccarton Village, which was in use from 1857 or 1858. This raises the question as to why, as Methodists, they should have been buried in a Church of England cemetery when the "Upper Riccarton" Methodist cemetery was available near by. However, Eliza Withell recorded that the Wesleyans actually held services in St Peters on Sunday afternoons before the building of their own church at Riccarton Village in 1886, and also that the Methodist congregation sometimes gathered in the Corlett house, next to St Peters, at this time (Withell 1924). This makes it clear that the Corlett affinities at any rate were with Riccarton Village rather than Upper Riccarton (i.e., Withells Road), and it is not inconceivable that they—and the Stubbs (who were buried from the Corlett house)—may have been interred at St Peters. Not only is it the area to which the singular term "Riccarton" was most frequently applied, but Cookson (1986) notes that in the early days of the Riccarton Village area the "rites of passage"—baptism, marriage, and burial—were

almost always performed at St Peters, regardless of the participants' denomination, because there was a resident cleric there. The possibility that the Corletts and Stubbs were interred at St Peters is counteracted by the absence of their names from that church's records and by Eliza Withell's recollection that her father, Stephen Corlett, was buried in the Withells Road cemetery (Withell 1924); but as she makes no mention of her mother or her sister Jane (Stubbs) being buried there it may be that her recollections were confused. (To avoid even further confusion with present day place names it should perhaps be noted here that the original "Riccarton Village" church at Church Corner is nowadays officially referred to as the "Upper Riccarton" Methodist Church—while the church on the 1871 "Upper Riccarton" site is today called "Russley". The place-name "Masham" is now rarely used but is applied to an area in the south-west of Russley.)

So we are left with only one unarguable piece of evidence, and that is that no remains which could possibly have been those of the elderly Stubbs or Corletts were removed from the piece of land cleared by Canterbury Museum in 1981. While it seems likely that we may never know where they were buried, we find it curious that the authorities, having been informed of the discrepancies before the reinterment of the remains, did not inform the appropriate relatives accordingly, and further, that incorrect information was placed on the headstone in the Waimairi Cemetery.

The question might well be asked: Does it matter that people are not buried where documents or headstones state they are? And the answer must be: Yes! It matters to anyone concerned about where his or her remains are to lie—and there are many such people in today's society, just as there were in yesterday's. It probably matters to an even greater extent to relatives and descendants of the buried person. It would certainly have mattered to the couple who travelled 500 km to attend the reburial service for their ancestors who were not there, had they but known it. It should matter to the local historians who use headstone inscriptions and death records as sources of information. And it must matter to anyone whose job directly or indirectly involves interpreting clues, data, and material from the past.

## CONCLUSIONS

The excavation of the Withells Road burial ground has provided useful historical and cultural information, and it has acted as an incentive to researching some of the available historical documentary records relating to the burials. It has also revealed major gaps and errors in the historical records.

The reinterment of the remains before they, and the associated potential sources of information, were fully investigated is unfortunate, although it would still be possible for some further documentary research to be done if resources were made available.

When we consider the confusion arising from the inadequate documentation of last century, and the misleading inscription on the Addington headstone, we find it a matter of considerable concern that the information on the Waimairi headstone, as well as that given to some of the descendants of those named thereon, is at variance with the known facts.

Archaeology has in this instance been an invaluable aid to the researching and checking of historical information, and the archaeological data provide a more accurate account of the Withells Road burials than either the historical or the contemporary records.

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## NOTE

1. Another interesting aspect of the investigation was the psychological effect that excavating and handling the remains had on the volunteers, all of whom were of European descent, and many of whom were experienced in excavating and handling Maori burials. In general they identified themselves markedly more closely with these European remains than they did with those of prehistoric Maoris — most of the excavators had seen friends and relatives buried in similar graves and similar coffins — and their instinctive indulgence in diversionary activities to avoid morbid speculation was particularly noticeable. All were left with a deeper understanding of the feelings of Maori people about the remains of their ancestors.

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