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NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN CEMETERIES IN THAMES

Nicholas Twohill
Thames

There are a number of wahi tapu and cemeteries in urban Thames, reflecting the past pattern of Maori and European settlement in the area. This paper is a brief survey of the four nineteenth-century cemeteries in Thames which were used by Europeans for burials. Monument terminology in the text is based on Pratten (1987: Appendix F).

Cemeteries are a resource for historical archaeology, as they provide another means to research and understand the past. Information may be derived from:

- their place in the physical, historical and religious landscape (Lynch 1997: 8; Pratten 1987: 3.8);
- headstones reveal social and economic history and reflect changing attitudes in society (Prickett 1999: 86-87; Cashmore *et al.* 1994: 65-66; McGuire 1988: 435-480; The National Trust of Australia 1982; Deetz and Dethlefsen 1967: 29-37);
- they contribute towards understanding the 'process of community' through 'types' (such as shape and decoration) and provide a 'restricted, tangible and controllable body of data' (Dethlefsen 1981: 138);
- headstones are a historical and biographical record in their own right (Prickett 1999; Alington 1991: 22-23; Pratten 1987: 3.6; The National Trust of Australia 1982; Dethlefsen 1981: 137);
- headstones and monuments constitute a unique set of art and craft related to contemporary styles in art, architecture and symbolism (The National Trust of Australia 1982: Introduction; Pratten 1987: 3.4, 3.5, 3.7); and cemeteries can be
- valuable examples of nineteenth-century formal garden design (The National Trust of Australia 1982).

Cemeteries have been tested as an historical archaeological tool. For example, in furthering knowledge on nineteenth-century New Zealand society, Hurley (1997) used data sets (frequencies on grave headstones) and Higgins (1998) applied a landscape archaeology methodology and GIS to a cemetery.

Historic Background

European settlement at Thames coincides with the return of Marutuahu to the Thames area towards the end of the Musket Wars. European traders were present along the Kauaeranga River by 1832 and remained, near the Kauaeranga Pa and at Moanataiari, until they were absorbed by the new order imposed when the Thames goldfield opened (Isdale 2000). The Church Missionary Society transferred its 1833 Puriri station to Herewaka on the Kauaeranga River in 1837. With the opening up of the Thames goldfield in 1867, Shortland and Grahamstown were established in 1867 and 1868 respectively at either end of the Shortland flat. Shortland grew on the north bank of the Kauaeranga River, where traders already dressed timber and stored goods in warehouses (Isdale 2000 and 1968: 24. The Duke of Edinburgh hotel by Shortland wharf was a converted warehouse). Grahamstown was speculative, but eventually became the centre of the goldfield because it was situated closer to the mines.

The Thames gold-rush population reached over 18,000 in 1868, to settle at about 6,000 by 1880 after people had left for goldfields in Queensland, Vogel's Public Works, etc. (Isdale 1967: 36). The goldfield was founded on the extraction and processing of ore, and support services including foundries and tramway systems. Diseases from poor sanitation, such as scarlet fever and typhoid, drownings, poverty (see Mace 1998), and mining accidents and sicknesses were everyday occurrences in nineteenth-century Thames.

Cemeteries

1. Church Missionary Society Cemetery (T12/898)

Two sandstone headstones located on a slope between a cliff and the Kauaeranga River mark the Church Missionary Society cemetery at Parawai. This burial-ground is more correctly a church graveyard. The mission station's church stood in front (west) of the cemetery from c 1845 until it was pulled down in 1910. A picket grave surround is discernible behind the church in a photograph taken by George Wood (Fig. 1).

The cemetery is situated on private land on and below the south side of Mount Sea Road (Fig. 2). In 1992 when the site was recorded the headstones were under a dominant privet tree canopy, with a fan date palm tree nearby.

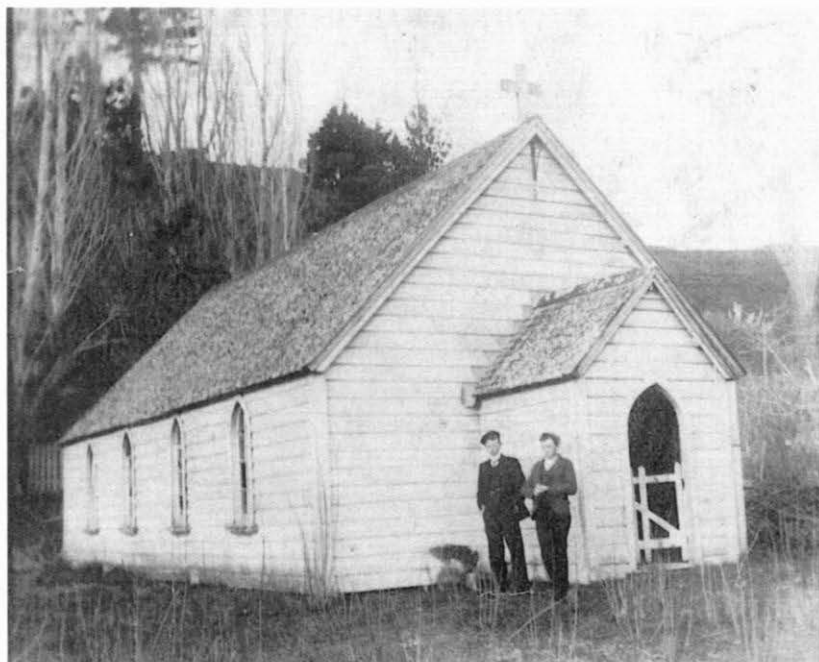


Figure 1. The Church Missionary Society church at Parawai, with a wooden picket grave surround visible near the left window. Photo courtesy of Ken wood.

Watsonia, periwinkle, leaf litter and tree trunks covered the ground, but now the privets have been cleared and the area has been converted into garden. The slope on which the headstones are located has been modified in recent years with the construction of a brick retaining-wall.

The headstones are in an area about 8 metres by 6.5 metres in extent. However, written and anecdotal evidence indicate that the cemetery is more extensive. The Reverend Nikorima Poutotara and his three children are recorded by George Wood on the photograph to have been buried on the slope, while a headstone for a Maunsell baby stood in the vicinity until it was stolen *c.* 1990 (Kathy Bell, *pers. comm.*). Ngati-Maru burials known to whanau are also in the cemetery (William Peters and Nigel Smith, *pers. comm.*). A standing anthropomorphic-shaped headstone with an incised Roman cross is dedicated to Rosetta Margaret Maunsell, who died on 7 July 1871. In 1992 the remains of a wooden picket surround lay on the ground by the headstone. A disassembled semi-circular

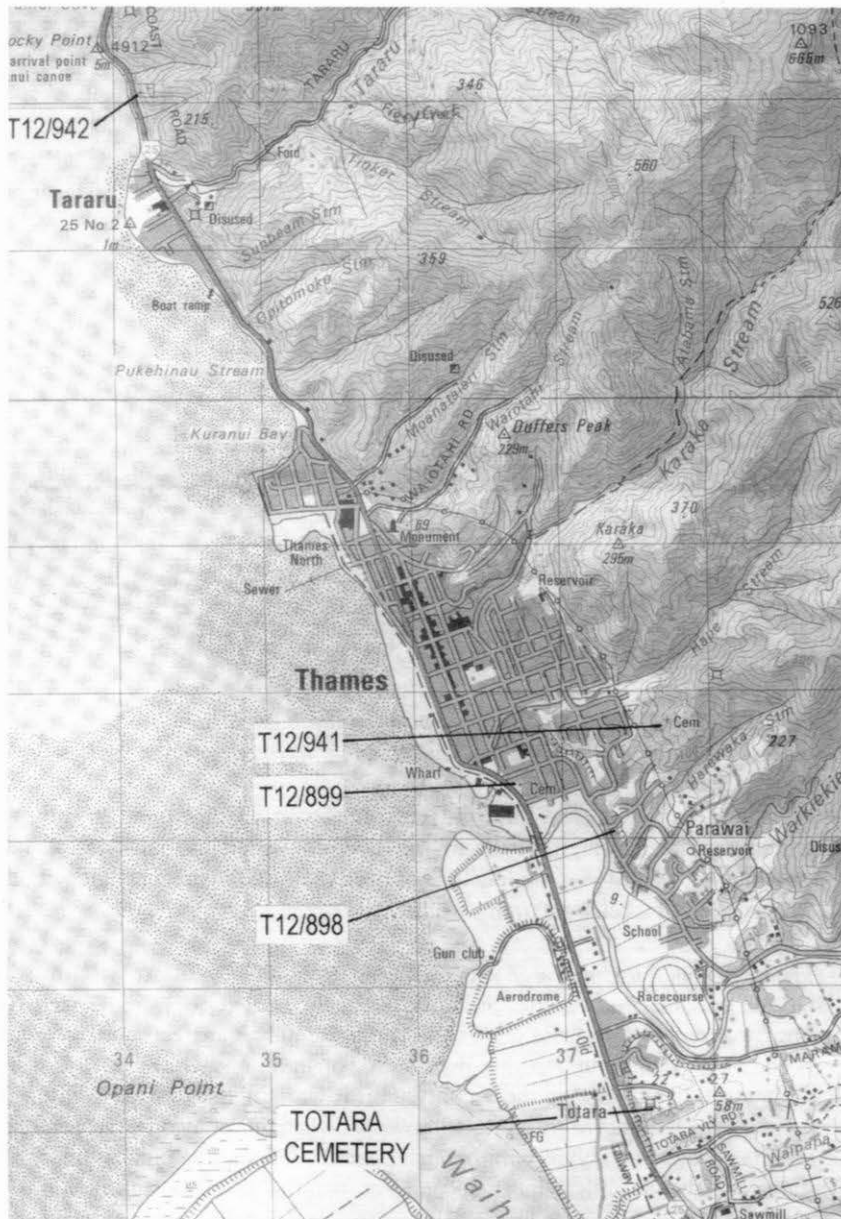


Figure 2. Location of cemeteries.

headstone for Laura Cooper, who died on 14 October 1875, lies 2.7 metres uphill from Rosetta Maunsell's headstone.

2. Cemetery (T12/899)

This cemetery was established on the outskirts of the burgeoning gold-mining settlement of Shortland. The headstones, together with the Warden's Court building (although now with an altered frontage) in Grey Street, are surviving tangible reminders of nascent Thames. While the cemetery is overseen by the Thames-Coromandel District Council, it is on Maori Customary Land described as Part Taiuwha A Block comprising 651 square metres, which is now enclosed on all sides by alienated land. McEnteer and Turoa (1993: 13) state that the cemetery is sited on one of the wahi tapu connected to the Te Kauaeranga pa:

“There are three separate wahi tapu located at the site of the Te Kauaeranga Pa. The first burial site is located under and adjacent to the Thames fitness centre, Feel Great Ltd., and a couple of surrounding sections including two blocks of flats. This urupa was also used by the first European settlers to the area. A few headstones remain, dated 1868 and 1870.”



Figure 3. A northeast view of cemetery T12/899 in 2001. The Feel Great gymnasium is to the right. Surviving monuments are under the Phoenix palm to the left.

The cemetery is visible from Jellicoe Crescent (Fig.3). Apart from several fruit trees and Phoenix palms, the cemetery is in lawn and its aspect is open. In 1992 when the site was first recorded, a willow tree, arum lilies and woolly nightshade were noted growing in the vicinity. The two remaining monuments in the northeast corner are under immediate threat from encroaching Phoenix Palms. A disassembled sandstone ogee-with-pediment headstone (presently propped up by a metal rod), dedicated to Joseph Francis Mulligan, who died on 1 September 1868 aged seven months, is separated by 0.6 metres from an intact marble obelisk, with an iron surround, recording Warren and Coleman deaths in 1869 and 1870. The extent of the cemetery is not known, but it appears to be small. Six metres southwest of the monuments five rectangular depressions were well-defined in 1992 within an area measuring 10 metres in length by 7 metres. Further south, an open drain cuts across the area and the Feel Great gymnasium is built next to the drain. A small group of headstones could be seen in the vicinity up to the 1950s (Alistair Isdale, *pers. comm.*). They were subsequently stacked in a corner of the cemetery before disappearing from the site.

The cemetery features in Theophilus Cooper's account of disposing of John Willis' body and explains why the cemetery was soon abandoned (Hocken Library Reprint 1978: 23):

“December 17 [1867].- John Willis, the poor man who was so sadly mutilated by the horses on the 14th December, has after dreadful suffering, passed from the excitement and turmoil of this strange place to another and, I trust, a better world. His remains were taken in a van this evening to the burial-ground, by his mates, who, to their praise, paid every attention to him in his sufferings; but, having dug the grave, they, as did also the widow, expressed great dissatisfaction in having to bury a fellow creature in such a place. The soil (an improper term to use) was nearly a mass a shells, and as fast as the grave was dug it filled with water. A general feeling of indignation was manifested by the people around. The Warden was sent for, and when he arrived, he told the widow of the deceased man that, if she wished it, the body should be sent to Auckland and be buried in consecrated ground. In the meantime, he and Mr Mitchell would endeavour to obtain subscriptions to defray the expenses. The body was then taken back to the dead-house.”

3. Shortland Cemetery (T12/941)

The first burial at Shortland Cemetery is recorded as having occurred in January 1869 (Thames-Coromandel District Council, Burial Records, Shortland Cemetery, Thames, Sexton's Book, 1869-1935). The burial was a reinterment from the cemetery (T12/899) on Shortland flat, after which all or most interments in the cemetery on the flat were taken up to Shortland Cemetery (*Thames Star*, 14 July 1938).



Figure 4. A southwest view of the Shortland Cemetery in the mid-1870s. The lower path climbs from the entrance gates (middle right) to the cemetery's east part. Pa site T12/1019 is located on the knoll (left).

Shortland Cemetery is located in the Huikaretu Block on a narrow spur running east - west which broadens beyond a knoll on the spur (Fig. 4). It is bounded on the north side by the Kakaramata Stream and on the south side by the Korokoro Stream. Shortland Cemetery ground was already an urupa when it was gifted by Maori (McEnteer and Turoa 1993: 13 and see D.4179[1874]). The knoll has a recorded pa (T12/1019), with other archaeological sites in the surrounding area consisting of another pa, find spots, middens and terraces. A northwest extension, downhill from the early cemetery, was acquired and surveyed out in 1908 (D.188520[1908]). This lower part runs parallel with Danby Street, which was formerly known as Cemetery Road. The steep climb up to the early upper part, uncontrolled vegetation, greater use of the lower cemetery and the opening up of Totara Cemetery at Totara pa in 1928 effectively closed off the early cemetery. The early part had occasional burials during the 1930s with one as late as 1957 (The New Zealand Society of Genealogists 1977: Shortland

Cemetery Memorial Inscriptions Transcriptions), while the extension has been used into the 1990s.

The layout of the lower extension is a grid pattern set out on the hillside. Extension paths and aisles are in grass. The early cemetery, however, is dominated by its situation on the spur and the prominent knoll. The Thames Cemetery Committee's Minute Book 1876-1899 (Thames-Coromandel District Council) records that paths had been cut at Shortland Cemetery by 1876, and that in the same year funds were allocated for a path to open up the higher southeast area of the cemetery where there were a few graves. In this area, the paths have an irregular wavy layout on the cemetery plan (paths now tend to be obscured and distorted by tree roots, fallen branches, widespread ivy, pine duff, leaf litter, etc.), whereas, after encircling the knoll, they are laid out as straight divisional paths on the lower-lying west side. They are wide, generally tarsealed and bordered in parts by drains and ceramic pipes. Aisles, once grassed and now dirt-surfaced, go off the paths.

Approach to the upper cemetery is evidenced by a side-cutting uphill from the corner of Danby Street and Hauraki Terrace. The side-cutting crosses the top of the extension and levels out where it has been excavated for a large concrete water tank near the start of the cemetery's 2.8 metre wide lower path. A structure, called a "mortuary house", was built in 1882 in the cemetery for use by clergy as a shelter and to store surplices and prayer books (*Thames Advertiser*, 11 January 1882 and 6 April 1882). The building no longer stands, but early photographs indicate that it was in the entrance area. An overgrown side-cutting beyond the east boundary of the extension goes along the south side of the Kakaramata gully to the back area of the cemetery and may have been another access road. The cemetery plan shows an entrance in the extension adjoining Danby Street.

Shortland Cemetery is 3.54 hectares and contains some 6558 registered burials (Thames-Coromandel District Council Burial Records, Shortland Cemetery, Burial Register 1869-1995). A variety of monument styles are represented throughout the cemetery. For instance, Gothic, gabled, cambered, semi-circular, semi-circular with cut away shoulders; obelisk and pillars with urn, broken column, angel, bird and pedestal; Roman Crosses; tablets, metal plaques; sarcophagi; decoration using dentils. Symbolism is evident. A marble monument in the upper part commemorating a last burial in 1908 has a scene of domes and spires overlooked by a radiating eye. Other features are surrounds made of wood, chains and cast iron. Grave heads are variously made of wood, sandstone, marble and granite. Bricks and stone (sometimes dressed) are also used besides

concrete to form grave boxes. Spaces among graves may either represent unmarked graves, unused plots or the loss of wooden 'headboards' to a fire which went though the cemetery at some stage (David Arbury, *pers comm.*).



Figure 5. An uphill, southeast and partial view of Shortland Cemetery from Danby St. in 2001. The lower part is in the foreground and the upper, earlier part is under the tree canopy.

An introductory note, written in 1977, in the genealogists' transcription of graveheads at Shortland Cemetery calls the upper cemetery a "bush area" (where about 500 graveheads were transcribed with much time and effort using slashers, secateurs and axes), while the "smaller section" (the extension) was found to be kept fairly clear by a goat. Records indicate that keeping vegetation under control in the cemetery has always been a problem for managers. For example, at the Annual Meeting of the Thames Cemetery Trustees on 17 July 1899 "Mr Radford referred to the necessity for the removal of some of the large trees in the cemeteries at Shortland and Tararu, as they were becoming a nuisance..." (*Thames Star*, 18 July 1899). In recent years the lower extension has been mown and kept open (Fig. 5). The upper cemetery was re-opened in 1992 by a Community Task Force project which cleared the dense vegetation from entrances, paths and aisles. However, weeds and scrub have reappeared after a recent short-lived annual spraying programme was abandoned and following a 1998 Periodic Detention blanket clearance project in the west

section which was stopped because of damage being done to monuments. Trees continue to cause widespread damage in the upper part, and the cemetery has a neglected appearance. On the other hand, its ambience is enhanced by established hawthorn, camellia, English oak, Monterey pine, macrocarpa, Moreton Bay fig, cypress, poplar, laurel, bay, spiraea, wild sweetpea, Japanese anemone, gladioli, arum lily, agapanthus, periwinkle, watsonia, ivies and roses. Steen (1966: 2,3) notes:

“High above the Firth of Thames, on a well wooded hillside, is the old secluded Tararu graveyard, where many miners and early settlers were buried; while at the base of the long, narrow Coromandel Peninsula is another hillside cemetery behind the gold-mining town of Thames. Many of the graves in these early burial grounds are covered with old roses, the most rampant being *Anaïs Ségales*. It was to this district that people flocked in their thousands when rich deposits of gold were found a hundred years ago, bringing with them many plants, some of which are still there.”

Vandalism, pilfering of cemetery furniture and grave components, tree-felling and windthrow, development and road formation on the periphery, lack of maintenance and attrition from natural causes have, together with periodical clearances, seriously impacted on the fabric and historical integrity of Shortland Cemetery.

4. *Tararu Cemetery (T12/942)*

The Tararu Cemetery is located on a coastal hillside immediately above the Thames Coast road (State Highway 25), between Tararu and Rocky Point. Approach is by a side-cutting between the Coast road and the cemetery. The road has a dry retaining-wall along part of its route, and is bordered by exotic vegetation including London plane, poplar, macrocarpa, Monterey pine, English oak, periwinkle and *tecoma*. At the top of the road there is a turning area. Gate piers, steps and a shed are located at the entrance to the cemetery (Fig. 6). In 1882 the shed was used by the sexton to store tools, but the Cemetery Committee decided to make the shed available to clergy while the sexton was to keep his tools under the building (*Thames Advertiser*, 11 January 1882).

Tararu Cemetery is a dedicated reserve of 3.46 hectares on land administered by the Department of Conservation and described as part of Waihoanga No.3A Block. It is bordered on its south boundary by the Pukohikohi Stream. The cemetery comprised 2 acres 3 roods 4 perches when it was surveyed out on 30

November 1873 (ML 03127). It was subsequently advertised in *The New Zealand Gazette* in November 1878 (page 1545) as one of a number of lands permanently reserved and by then consisted of 8 acres 2 roods 7 perches in the Tanutanu Block.

The cemetery's layout may be loosely described as elliptical with a concentric arrangement of paths and rows. The paths are tarsealed and concreted, and have drains. Narrow paths and steps lead off from the main paths. In places narrow aisles between graves suggest intensive occupancy. There are 989 registered burials in the cemetery. The first recorded burial was in August 1873 (Thames-Coromandel District Council, Tararu Cemetery, Burial Record Book, 1873-1883). The most recent burial (an ashes interment) was in 1997. As at Shortland Cemetery, monuments at Tararu display a mixture of styles and materials, as well as having spaces between marked graves. There is also a mausoleum belowground.

By 1876 paths were laid out in certain areas, and had been sown in grass, as well as plantings of pines, cypresses and different ornamental trees and flowers (Thames-Coromandel District Council, Thames Cemetery Committee, Minute Book, 1876-1899). The cemetery's early appearance is also portrayed to some extent in a letter to the editor of the *Evening Star* on 10 August 1886 signed by "Tararu" complaining about the deterioration in the care of Tararu Cemetery (mentioned as "God's acres", and "this silent town") under the current sexton:

"Tararu was, as a cemetery, the best in the Auckland province - the grass well mown, the walks well gravelled, and the flowers in profusion."

Upkeep of Tararu cemetery has been cyclical. Amelia Howe (1964: 58) recounts her brother's funeral and burial at Tararu on 18 November 1899:

"At last we arrived. We picked our way among the graves, many of them overgrown. The paths were muddy from recent rain and the hems of our long dresses dragged in the mud."

According to Fred Weston in a letter to the *Thames Star* on 5 October 1933, Tararu was in neglect during the 1920s. During the Great Depression, unemployed and a "committee of Tararu ladies" were keeping the cemetery in order by attending to graves "and making them into things of beauty" and making waste places "pleasing to the eyes" (*Thames Star*, 28 September 1933 and 5 October 1933). A group of Tararu women called the Friends of the Tararu

Cemetery headed by Anna Selmes (whose husband was buried in the cemetery in 1924) carried on from the Ladies' Committee from the 1940s to the 1960s, after which the cemetery fell into neglect (Alistair Isdale, *pers. comm.*). Poulgrain (1999) recalls: "The Garden of Sleep as she [Anna Selmes] called it, was kept like a park partly with her own labour and partly by assistants to whom she would pay wages out of her own pocket." When the site was recorded in 1995, herbicide was widely and effectively used by district council, and apart from some oleander, agapanthus, periwinkle and eleagnus, the cemetery was distinctly stark in appearance. Access from the Coast road has been closed for safety reasons since 1998 and no maintenance has been carried out in the cemetery (Montgomery Watson 2001: 52), and vegetation has taken hold again. Several clean-ups have been done since 1998 including one last year by members of the Elim Church youth group which volunteered several weekends clearing half the cemetery (*Hauraki Herald*, 16 June 2000).

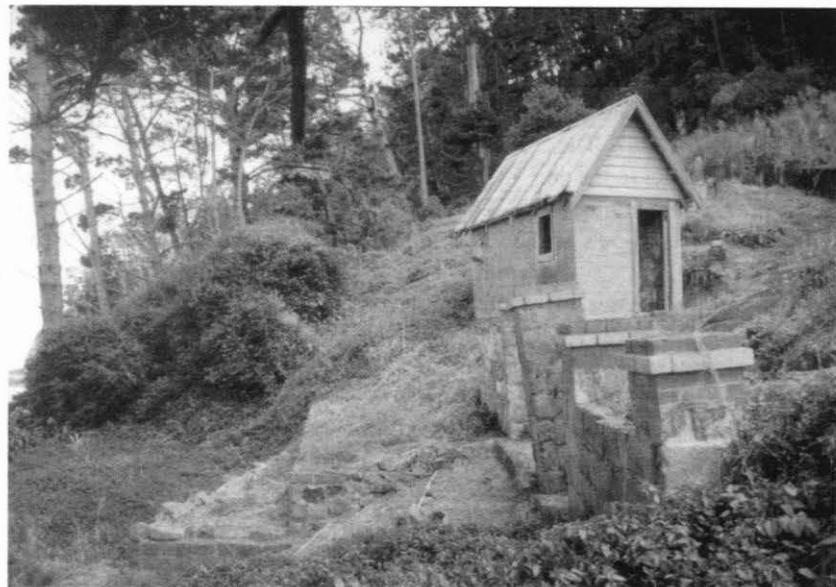


Figure 6. A north view of the Tararu Cemetery entrance in 2001: a turning area (left), steps, gate piers and shed.

Conclusions

Four nineteenth-century cemeteries in Thames have been briefly described. They reflect the growth of Thames from trading post, a mission settlement, gold-mining town and port to its eventual development as a rural service centre.

The layout of Shortland and Tararu cemeteries are significant as surviving elements of a Victorian landscape in the urban area.

With the modern trend towards lawn cemeteries and, possibly in the future, only cremation in disposing of the dead, elaborate Victorian cemeteries such as Shortland and Tararu will assume even greater significance as social and historical landmarks.

By way of postscript, the Thames-Coromandel District Council released a draft Cemetery Management Plan for community comment in January, which included a section on disused cemeteries (Montgomery Watson 2001: 23). The proposed plan is timely in view of the deterioration which is occurring at Shortland and Tararu cemeteries. It is stated in the draft that Council sets out to preserve and maintain disused cemeteries as “places of historic interest with meaning and value to the community.” As part of policy

- “all disused cemeteries are to be closed under the Burial and Cremation Act 1964;
- a level of service required for each disused cemetery is to be determined. It is recommended that the minimum level of service should be to provide safe public access and to control vegetation to a minimal standard;
- the heritage status of the cemeteries is to be investigated;
- and in consultation with local historical societies, Tourism Coromandel and other community groups, interest is to be sought in developing closed cemeteries as tourist spots”.

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