

# Permission sought for body shift

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By ANTONY PALTRIDGE

THE New Plymouth Methodist Church wants to move the remains of more than 40 people buried at its Fitzroy site to another cemetery so it can sell the property.

The church has called on the descendants of 42 people buried at the Henui Primitive Methodist Burial Ground between 1847 and 1871 to contact its church office.

Church trustee Bruce Hanrahan said that until recently the parish was unaware that the 971m<sup>2</sup> churchyard was also a burial ground.

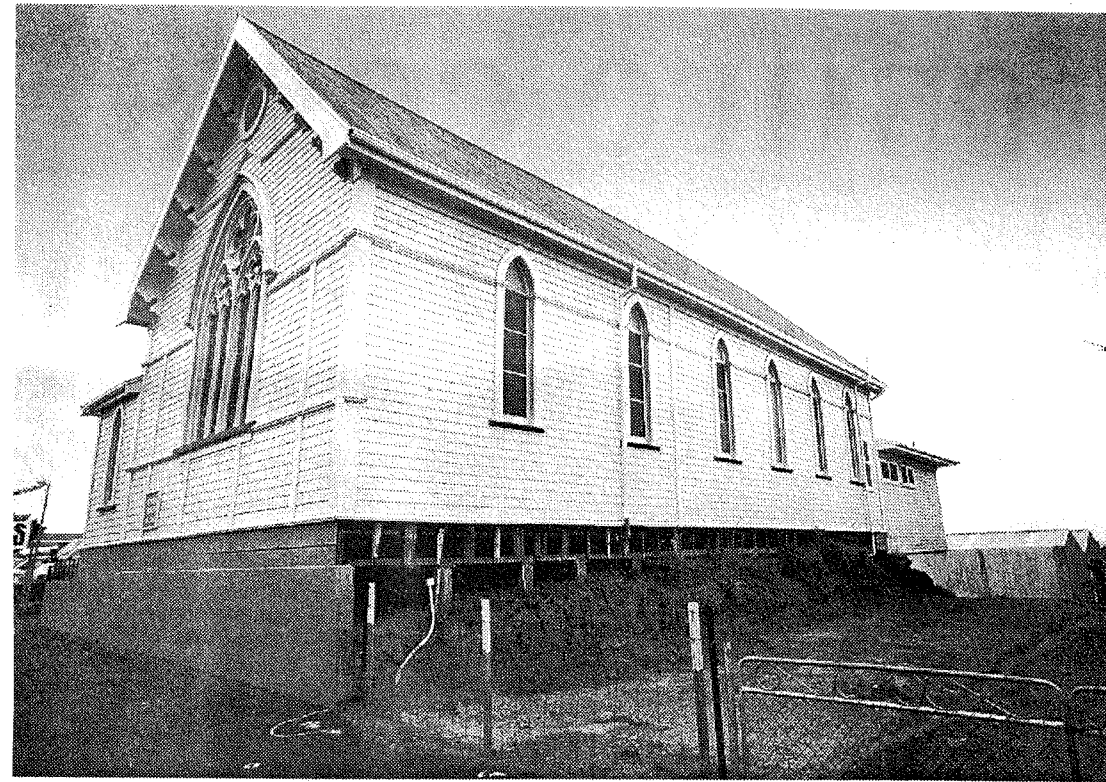
The three headstones alongside the church were believed to be just memorial stones to early members of the church.

But in March, contractors placing a driveway along one side of the church uncovered two skeletons. The Fitzroy church had planned to turn the rear of the site into a carpark.

The church then called in an expert in the use of ground penetrating radar and 21 burial sites were found, some in the driveway area and the rest at the rear of the church. The skeletons which were discovered were covered over again and no bodies have been removed from the site.

Mr Hanrahan said when the Primitive Methodist Church at Fitzroy and the Wesleyan Methodists merged, some of the church records were lost. As well, at one stage the site was abandoned by the church.

However, by contacting the Genealogical Society, the church found that 42 people were



**METHODIST MOVES:** The Fitzroy Methodist Church grounds from where bodies may be shifted to another cemetery so the site can be sold. The church is seeking descendants of those buried in the grounds so they can give permission for the plan. Photo: ADRIAN MALLOCH

buried there from 1847 to 1871. The majority were young children, some of whom had only lived for a few days. The oldest person in the burial ground was 59.

Since the bodies were discovered, the Methodist Parish in New Plymouth had decided that instead of operating from three sites (Westown, Central New Plymouth and Fitzroy), it would centralise its activities on its Liardet St site.

Mr Hanrahan said the sale of the two church properties at Westown and Fitzroy would then

allow a major revamp of the Liardet St site.

The church planned to move the Fitzroy remains to its cemetery at Hurdon.

Mr Hanrahan said that with the exception of one person, all those contacted so far had been generally favourable to the church's plan. He emphasised that the church would not be pressuring anyone and, unless all descendants agreed, the plan would not go ahead.

If the proposal did not go ahead, the church would have to look at other options, he said.