

Methodists abandon plan to move burial remains

DN. Feb 9 1999

By ANTONY PALTRIDGE

THE New Plymouth Methodist Parish has abandoned plans to remove the remains of more than 40 people buried at its Fitzroy site.

Church trustee Bruce Hanrahan yesterday said the parish had decided to leave the burial ground undisturbed.

"As a result of this decision, the burial ground will shortly be grassed and planted out and the headstones that were removed for safe keeping will be re-erected.

"In the future, we would anticipate that a plaque will be erected to commemorate all the people buried there."

In March 1997, contractors placing a driveway along one side of the church uncovered two skeletons. The church was not aware any bodies were buried there and believed the headstones along the side of the church were just memorial stones to people buried elsewhere.

But an expert using ground penetrat-

ing radar later found 21 burial sites on the 971m² property, while the Genealogical Society found records that 42 people were buried there between 1847 and 1871.

Later in 1997, the New Plymouth Methodist community decided to consolidate on its Liardet St site and sell its properties at Fitzroy and Westown, and to move the Fitzroy remains to a cemetery in Hurdon.

But since then, a Samoan Methodist community had been established in New Plymouth and it was now using the Fitzroy site, he said.

As well, two descendants of the people buried at the Fitzroy site had opposed the move, he said.

"We have always said we would not do anything (to the site) if people were opposed."

The church had sent letters outlining its decision to all of the descendants it had contacted as well as the Ministry of Health and Taranaki Healthcare's health protection unit, he said.