



St Luke's cemetery, Bell Block, from William Hulke's grave.

St Luke's cemetery, Bell Block, is knee-deep in grass with cracked concrete and broken headstones.

Is this neglected spot a fitting tribute to the pioneers of the Taranaki district buried there?

At least one Herald reader does not think so.

Following an article in the Taranaki Herald about a neglected rural cemetery, Wandering has written to the editor complaining about the state of the area at Bell Block.

Wandering points out that St Luke's contains the bones of William Hulke who is reputed to have established the Jersey cattle

breed in Taranaki, among other achievements.

"But perhaps more important is the fact that in it are the graves of many of the earlier settlers (particularly those who arrived on the Amelia Thompson) as well as those of many of the descendants of these pioneers," the letter says.

"Many of these people were responsible for the Anglican Church possessing this now valuable tract of land. And of course they established the faith there and built their place of worship.

"So why is the church so backward in acknowledging the debt they owe to these people and showing the graves the respect

which is their due? Surely it cannot be money, is it indifference — or insensitivity?

"Who is responsible for maintenance of an actual grave? The rest of the burial area must certainly be the responsibility of the owners of the property.

"Sheep and horses grazed there. Both these animals do damage and their usage is unacceptable. Why not a mower and just a little manpower?

"Rank growth and broken fences reflect no credit on anyone connected with this property."

A Herald team assigned to investigate the situation came up with the following information.



One of the older graves.

Weed choked link to founding fathers

Despite its important links with the history and the development of Taranaki the upkeep of St Luke's Cemetery has proved a problem for years.

The cemetery covers half the Bell Block property on SH3 bounded by a stone and concrete fence. The other half, where St Luke's Church once stood, lies vacant and overgrown.

In 1973 Taranaki Newspapers reported a meeting was held to discuss its future and the possibility of the Taranaki County Council taking over maintenance work being considered.

Other suggestions were for some graves to be concreted to allow for a lawn mower to manoeuvre between plots and the removal of some of the railings around the very old graves.

A working bee was set up then to do some tidying up.

In 1955 the hospital erected as a memorial by the St Luke's Ladies Guild in 1934 was damaged by a car. Because of insurance delays it took 10 months to be repaired.

Director of the Taranaki Museum and Taranaki Historic Places Trust committee member Ron Lambert said the trust is interested in having cemeteries maintained but there are too many all over the country to enable it to assist financially.

He says it is the responsibility of descendants to keep family plots tidy but he acknowledged that many local bodies often do more than they are obliged to in this area.

Mr Lambert says there are probably descendants of the Bell Block cemetery still living in Taranaki who could look after family plots.

Since the cemetery is on land owned by the Anglican Church it too has a responsibility for its maintenance.

Archdeacon D. W. King is not yet prepared to comment on St Luke's cemetery because the Taranaki Church of England Trust Board is working on the issue.

The first St Luke's Church was built at Bell Block on a site chosen by

Story: MARTINE CUFF
Pictures: SUSAN WELSH

Archdeacon Henry Govett and purchased from the Crown by Bishop Selwyn in 1857 for £8-18-3.

The church was opened by Govett's locum Rev Meyrick Lally on St Luke's Day, 1857. (Govett was in England at the time).

It was the second Anglican church to be built east of New Plymouth in Taranaki.

By 1901 however, the church was earmarked for demolition because it was too small for the needs of the congregation.

Although it had been, "A most important building in its day" (Taranaki Herald of September 25, 1901) it was now in an unsafe condition.

Subscriptions for a new church were called for and on September 26, 1901, Archdeacon Govett laid the foundation stone of the new St Luke's.

Archdeacon Govett used a mallet made in part from one of the old puriri posts which first encircled the Mother Church of St Mary's and the other part from one of the communion rails of the old St Luke's.

Over 100 people attended, the open-air service along with the clergy and surpliced choir of St Mary's. They sang the hymn The Church's One Foundation and following the appropriate psalms and another hymn, Rev Frank Evans gave a brief address.

He said St Luke's had stood unharmed throughout the Land Wars. "And now, by a curious coincidence, the first subscription for the new church which was to replace it came from a Maori."

After the formal proceedings a collection was held, raising another £9-18-12 towards the new church. A hockey and football match followed with a concert in the evening.

But it was not until February 1906

that the church and property were consecrated.

From about 1899 to 1903 Rev Frederick Augustus Bennett, who later became first Bishop of Auckland, used Bell Block as his home base while he worked to revive the mission work begun before the Land Wars.

His parish stretched from White Cliffs in the north to the Waitotara River in the south.

Rev Bennett was instrumental in

the establishment of a Maori hospital in New Plymouth and was involved in petitioning Parliament for reform of the liquor laws which he felt were not in the best interests of the Maori.

St Luke's Church served the Anglican congregation of Bell Block until the 1970s.

In February 1976 the church was moved to Mr B. Rumball's farm on Dorset Rd to become part of his house.

Now all that is left is the graveyard, the final resting place of a number of Taranaki's pioneers.

William King Hulke is probably the most famous of these.



The second St Luke's Church, Bell Block. Picture courtesy of Taranaki Museum.

Jersey pioneer

The grave of William King Hulke is one of the more notable of those in the St Luke's Cemetery at Bell Block.

Hulke is reputed to have been a key figure in establishing the Jersey dairy cow in Taranaki and was a prominent early farmer and businessman.

One of his enterprises, the Egmont Steam Flour Mill, still operates in New Plymouth although drinks and food are now served where once flour was ground.

Hulke was born in Deal, England in 1819. His father was a physician and attended the Duke of Wellington during his last illness. According to one report the great Duke died in St Hulke's arms.

After a brief spell with the East India Company and farming in Pembrokeshire, William Hulke emigrated to New Zealand. He arrived on the London on December 12, 1840.

A week later Hulke, with a number of other settlers, set out to walk to Wanganui, arriving on December 30.

Hulke was involved in the establishment of the first store in Wanganui. He later returned to Wellington and there established a herd of dairy cows he had brought over from Sydney. His farm supplied milk and vegetables to the people of Wellington.

In 1842 he returned to Wanganui and set up a flour mill.

Five years later he moved the machinery to New Plymouth and established the water-powered Union mill in Queen Street.

In the early 1850s Hulke bought a farm

at Bell Block but had to move back to New Plymouth in 1860 for his own safety when the Maori Wars broke out.

Then in 1866, with F. L. and W. D. Webster, Hulke built a steam flour mill in Currie Street. It still stands today refurbished to house restaurants and bars as the Egmont Steam Flour Mill.

He later moved back to Bell Block and in 1876 established a model dairy farm on Corbett Road. His herd of pure-bred Jersey cattle became famous throughout New Zealand. (It was in 1876 that Hulke is said to have led Jenny, a pedigree Jersey cow, from Marton to Bell Block, a distance of 130 miles).

Hulke in his last years suffered from a very distressing malady which kept him almost a prisoner, but in spite of his great age his mental powers remained strong until the last: his obituary in the Taranaki Herald said:

He died in 1908 and was survived by his wife and two sisters in Deal.

Also buried in the cemetery are some of the first settlers who arrived in Taranaki on the Plymouth Company Barque Amelia Thompson.

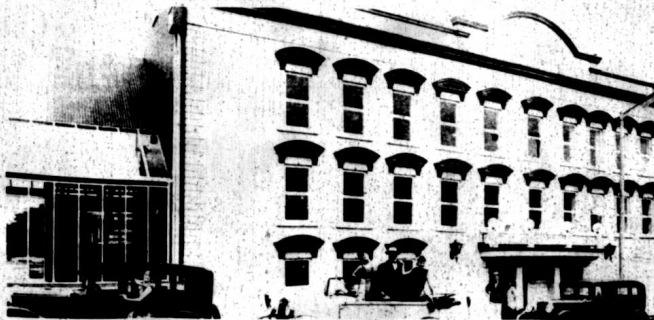
One hundred and eighty-seven men, women and children left England on this ship on March 25, 1841, for a new life in the colonies.

It was probably both good luck and good management that the Amelia Thompson ever completed the journey. Neither Captain Dawson nor the settlers knew at the time that the ship's back had been broken when it was launched.



William King Hulke, pioneer dairy farmer and an original owner of the Egmont Steam Flour Mill in New Plymouth.

Picture courtesy of Taranaki Museum.



Another memorial to William Hulke, the Egmont Steam Flour Mill.

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