

6.7 Okato Cemetery

Description

Location:	South Road, State Highway 45, Okato
Legal description:	Part Section 4 Okato Town Belt and Part Section 4, 2, 2 Okato Town Belt and Section 2 and Section 3 Survey Office Plan 404907
Size:	2.06 hectares
Reserve status:	Subject to Reserves Act 1977
Reserve classification:	Local purpose (cemetery) reserve



Physical description

Okato Cemetery is located at the eastern entrance to Okato Township on State Highway 45. The driveway entrance to the cemetery is through a tree lined area and wetland, before ascending to the burial area. Much of Part Section 2 is a wetland.

The land ascends to the burial area in Parts Section 4, with half of the available burial area developed for burials, and the remaining in grazing. The neighbouring property to the south and east is farmland and the neighbour to the north and west is the closed primary school, with associated open spaces including sports fields and assorted school buildings.

Tangata whenua interests

This reserve is within the tribal rohe of Taranaki Iwi. It is of historic and cultural significance to Nga Mahanga-a-Tairi hapu.

Land status and acquisition history

In a gazette notice dated October 1881 (page 1308), James Prendegast the Chief Justice of the Colony of New Zealand, pursuant to 'The Special Powers and Contracts Act 1881', changed the purpose of the following reserve from educational to public cemetery; being part of Town Belt No.2 on the map of the Okato Township. Note that this area is now the two Part Sections 2.

Trustee appointments were notified by gazette notices in 1882, 1896, 1903, 1920, 1929 and 1930.

A Certificate of Title 128/104 dated 14 June 1929, for Part Section 4 Okato Town Belt, the central section in the cemetery, lists the following Trustees for the purpose of a public cemetery pursuant to the Cemeteries Act 1882:

William Neilson Syme
John O'Connor
Robert Frederick Roebuck
Thomas Doyle
William Andrews

Another Certificate of Title 128/105 dated 14 June 1929, for Part Section 4 Okato Town Belt, the southern section in the cemetery, lists the following Trustees for the purpose of a public cemetery pursuant to the Cemeteries Act 1882:

John O'Connor
Robert Frederick Roebuck
Thomas Doyle
William James Gray
Thomas Pole Hughson

In a gazette notice dated September 1933 (page 2429), Governor-General Bledisloe pursuant to Section 4 the 'Cemeteries Act 1908', delegated to the Taranaki County Council the powers to appoint and remove Trustees.

On 19 September 2006, the Council resolved to accept control of the Okato Cemetery from the Okato Cemetery Board upon completion of all legal requirements as prescribed in the Burials and Cremation Act 1964 section 23(3) and (4). A boundary adjustment subdivision applied for in 1996 was not completed and work was undertaken in 2007 to correct the situation prior to the transfer of control of the cemetery. There were difficulties progressing the 2007 subdivision application and a new survey and consent application was required, with delays of approval from the Ministry of Education which was involved in a small part of the land adjustment.

The 2007 subdivision involved the addition to the cemetery of Section 2 Survey Office Plan 404907 (321m²) from Part Lot 1 DP 5886 and Section 3 Survey Office Plan 404907 (27m²) from Part Section 2, Okato Town Belt (Ministry of Education). A strip of land at the southern end of the cemetery's Part Section 4, Okato Town Belt (431m²) was taken from the cemetery and vested in the adjoining owner.

Upon clarification of the cemetery boundaries, a request was made to the Governor-General to appoint control of the cemetery to the Council.

In a gazette notice dated November 2008 (page 4522), the Governor-General pursuant to Section 23(3) of the Burial and Cremations Act 1964, appointed the Council to have control and management of Okato Cemetery.

In a gazette notice dated March 2009 (page 849), Graeme Gillespie the Group Manager of Population Health Protection for Minister of Health, pursuant to section 23(4) of the 'Burial and Cremation Act 1964' and section 13 of the 'Interpretation Act 1999', amended the gazette notice of November 2008 by deleting the schedule describing the land and replacing with a new schedule. The previous 2008 gazette notice had not included all part sections of the cemetery.

A Certificate of Title dated 27 March 2009 notes the New Plymouth District Council as proprietors of the Okato Cemetery. Underlying title for Part Section 2 is with the Crown.

History and cultural values

On 14 May 1953, the Director-General, Department of Lands and Survey wrote to the Department of Health indicating that the Department of Education has requested part of the Okato Cemetery land be acquired by the Okato District High School. This land being swampy and of no use to the cemetery for burials could be used by the school for additional classrooms. The cemetery trustees had been contacted and were agreeable to the proposal. On 4 June 1953 the Department of Health (DOH) notified the Director-General, Department of Lands and Survey that there was no objection from the DOH for the transfer of cemetery land as proposed.

This correspondence in 1953 explains why the northwest corner of Part Section 2 has been separated from its parent. Although the subdivision has been enacted, no transfer occurred and the land remains as cemetery.

The Council was informed that the Okato Cemetery Board was no longer able to undertake the maintenance and operation of the Okato Cemetery and had requested that the Council assume full responsibility for the cemetery. The Council resolved on 19 September 2006, to accept control of the Okato Cemetery from the Okato Cemetery Board. This was on condition of completion of all legal requirements, as prescribed in the Cemeteries and Cremation Act 1964 section 23(3) and (4).

The Council also resolved to thank the Okato Cemetery Board for their longstanding contribution to the community through the management of the Okato Cemetery. The Cemetery Board had been administering the operation of the cemetery since its inception in 1882.

Okato Cemetery is listed as a Category B heritage site in the District Plan.

Existing improvements

There is an entrance gate to the cemetery off State Highway 45, a driveway up to the burial ground and an operations implement shed.

Management and administration

The Ministry for Culture and Heritage maintains one war grave at this cemetery, relating to World War II.

Management objectives and specific policies

- This cemetery is managed as an open cemetery.
- The undeveloped part of the cemetery will be managed through grazing.
- The Parks Programme Team are to meet twice yearly with the Okato Cemetery community liaison group.
- When Part Section 4, the part section nearest to State Highway 45 reaches capacity, the other part Section 4 to the south will be developed for burials. The estimation is a further 11 years burial capacity in the developed part of the cemetery.
- Prior to developing the undeveloped Part Section 4 (southern part), an integrated design to upgrade the cemetery layout will be undertaken. The design would include the following:
 - Extension of roadway including turnaround, into the southern Part Section 4.
 - Leveling of contours to enhance burial activities of the southern Part Section 4, with a retaining wall or batter.
 - Relocation of the WWII monument within the cemetery.
 - Replacement or relocation of the existing implement shed to within the developed part of the cemetery.
 - Design of existing and potential garden areas and the entranceway.
 - Consideration of additional seating at the cemetery.

The timeframe for the design would to be completed by 2014/15 incorporating design solutions into the driveway extension with the leveling of contours. The driveway extension is currently planned for 2016/17, at a cost of \$25,000. The overall design and works are estimated to cost \$100,000.

Outlined area indicates the area of pre 1900 development at the cemetery, constituting an archaeological area under the Historic Places Act 1993.

