

PUREWA AND ITS CEMETERY

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In the late 1880s, with the cemeteries at Symonds St and Waikumete either too crowded or too far from Auckland city, a part of the St John's College (Church of England) estate was surveyed out for this purpose on the sunny slopes above Purewa Creek. This cemetery, the expanses of mangrove on the Creek and the bush and pasture opposite make the valley today a peaceful place for rest or nature study, the only disturbance an occasional train. There is some threat to all this in a proposal to route a gas pipeline here; it should be located on ground already spoilt by the railway.

In the early days the Creek was navigable by yacht and large canoe almost to the top of the tidal section, and it was here that Bishop Selwyn landed in the spring of 1844, and set up the temporary settlement of Purewa, before building at the College's ridge-top location a short time later (Cotton MS., Jackson 1976, Platts 1971).

Purewa is apparently a mistake for "Pourewa", the name of an ancient look-out on the opposite side of the valley (Simmonds 1979). Despite suitable ground the edge of the Creek was unoccupied by the Maori; the "Bishop's neighbours" lived to the south-west above Orakei and Pukapuka Creeks (Cotton MS. in particular William Bambridge's "Map and Plan of Purewa", this reproduced in Knight 1972 p.12). The midden conspicuous at the Creek and in the gully west of the cemetery then perhaps dates only to European settlement.

I have found no trace of the Purewa settlement nor of the landing place, which was used as the College port at least until the removal to Mission Bay in 1849. Selwyn directed that the mangroves be cleared from the landing and ballast rock be dumped there but the very considerable silting-up of the Creek and the attendant growth of mangroves have hidden any jetty piles, rocks &c. Bambridge's sketch map, inaccurate as to topography, places the landing between the mouths of the two small streams on the eastern half of the cemetery. The present-day limit of the mangroves is at the mouth of the higher of these streams. Tides reach higher but the Creek is narrowed, getting a gorge-like character from the presence of hard sandstone beds. Such reefs, now silted over, may have determined the landing's exact location.

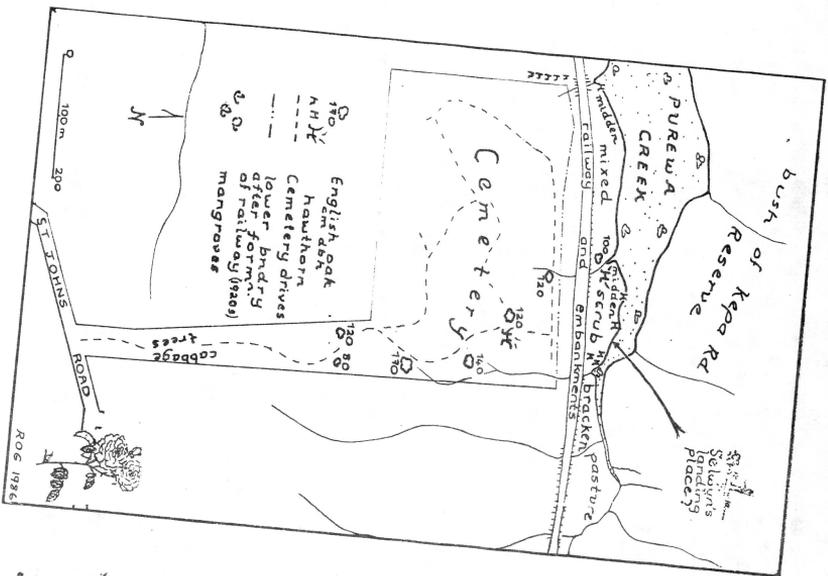
The settlement was made in open ground, probably bracken, with shelter on the east provided by "wood", and scrub here and there upslope onto the treeless College ridge of manuka, bracken and tutu (Cotton MS., Reed 1935 p.243). An 1887 plan of the cemetery (in St John's College library) has "birch" (probably *Myrsine australis*) and "titree" (*Leptospermum ericoides*?) as the dominants of different scrub areas on these heavy clay slopes. A Kinder watercolour of 1878 (Dunn 1985 p.123) also shows conspicuous tonal differences across this ground. Nothing survives of the scrub and the oldest native trees in the cemetery today probably are the 8 m tall hollow-based cabbage trees which lie between the gully heads near St John's Rd. Likewise all that remains of the "wood" are a few kowhai, titoki and karaka at the Creek edge, none of large size.

The oldest planted trees in the cemetery slopes seem likely to be the dozen or so English oaks (only the largest shown in the figure) which

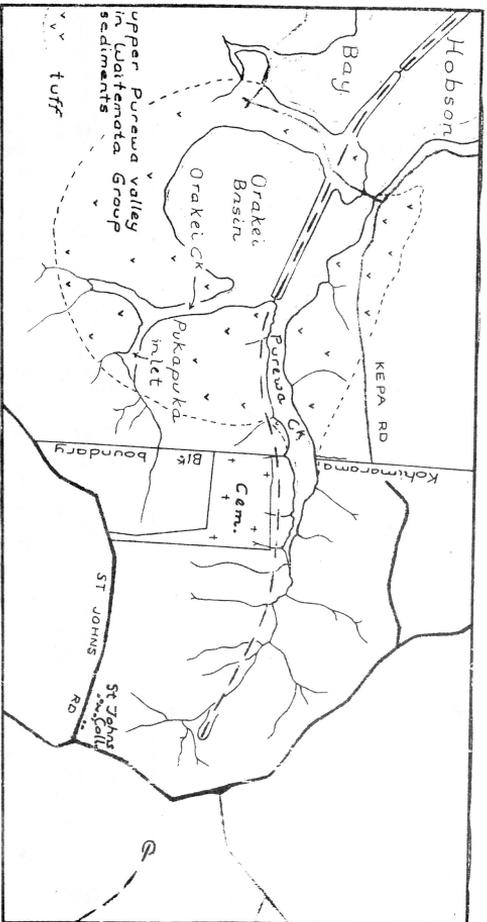
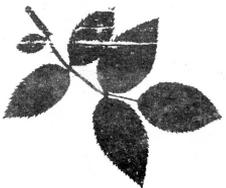
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16

Purewa



Cemetery



occur in irregular association with the alignment of the old cart-track from the settlement site up to St John's Road. I have not tried to ring-date any of these trees; reasons for supposing they pre-date the cemetery include their restricted and internal location and the known reception by the College of young plants from overseas (Burstall and Sale 1984 p.52). There are old oaks at the College itself and on Orakei Basin; an expert might be able to tell how closely related all these trees are.

Also on the lower eastern side of this ground are two old hawthorns, (Crataegus monogyna); that within the present-day cemetery bounds is perhaps Auckland's largest being 9 m tall with seven 25 cm dbh trunks. Younger but still respectable-sized hawthorn occur here and there in the scrub along the Creek edge below the cemetery and railway. They are clearly seen on the aerial photographs of 1951, when the land was grazed, but now have to be searched for among a tall scrub of shining privet (Ligustrum lucidum), brush wattle (Albizia lophantha) and stretches of blackberry, bracken or gorse. Hawthorn is still naturalizing but mostly on ground it already holds.

The western edge of the cemetery lies along the boundary of the Kohimarama Block (purchased by the Crown in 1841) and also bounds the College estate. It is somewhat surprising then that no very old trees occur here; there are some obscure lengths of ditch-and-bank hedge the hawthorn of which are quite small.

The ornamental trees planted in the cemetery are growing well but are otherwise rather ordinary — oaks, planes, cypresses, totara, pohutukawa &c. Some however redeem themselves by having naturalized (at least to seedlings and juveniles) on the cracking masonry of the older graves.

The most notable naturalization is that of the Kermadec Island pohutukawa, apparently a first record for the mainland. The four adult wildings I have found seem to be the pure species rather than hybrids with ordinary pohutukawa.

Perhaps also needing especially-warm conditions for seed germination of seedling root growth are two other plants very sparingly naturalized: Casuarina cunninghamiana (a few seedlings) and Lantana camara (two or three adults; no smaller plants seen).

The most conspicuous naturalized exotic is sexton's bride (Raphiolepis umbellata), which now decks some hundreds of graves in appropriately marmoreal fashion. It is a "cast-iron" plant with abundant berries and is increasing in a few places around Auckland harbour.

Pohutukawa likewise occurs in hundreds, conveniently placed for an examination of the juvenile-to-adult changes in their foliage. Other trees (mostly as seedlings and saplings perhaps because the graves get some clearance) are approximately in order of abundance: lillipilli Acmena smithii, hawthorn, totara, shining privet (rather infrequent), silky oak Grevillea robusta, brush cherry Syzygium australe, holm oak Quercus ilex and Paulownia tomentosa. There are three young rusty figs (Ficus rubiginosa), two on graves and one perching in the buttresses of a Cupressus macrocarpa; also a single instance of a wild eucalyptus (E. botryoides?).

Small plants of Liquidambar styraciflua, not seedlings but root suckers, disrupt graves on some shady banks. As elsewhere around Auckland, Griselinia littoralis produces good seed but in accordance with its natural distribution has not established itself here.

Common small trees or shrubs besides Raphiolepis are Cotoncaster

glaucophyllus ssp. serotinus, spindle (Euonymus japonica), Coprosma robusta, Pittosporum crassifolium, and a few Buddleja davidii and Coprosma macrocarpa.

Dog rose (Rosa canina) grow on a few older graves; sweet briar (R. rubiginosa) is seen on only two graves and once at the western boundary, though it is common enough in the horse pasture on the opposite side of the Creek. The old variety of French rose R. gallica 'Anais Segales' suckers over the clay top of only one grave. Memorial rose (R. wichuriana) spreads more extensively, suckering over neglected paths and in masonry. It produces fruit but I have seen no seedlings.

The smaller cemetery plants are of little note, though explanation is needed perhaps for the near-absence of iridaceous plants.

Climbing fig Ficus pumila has in one place enveloped its grave from rails to headstone but is now in limbo, its creeping shoots unable to cross the narrow leaf-littered strips to the next graves.

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