

**“Buried with out the burial service”:
archaeological monitoring of possible grave site on the
Westchester Drive extension, Glenside, Wellington,
under HP authority 2010/311 for Wellington City Council**



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Frontispiece

Looking east over the route of the new road. Glenugie House was on the other side of the Porirua Stream (in the trees).

Introduction

In 2009 Mary O’Keeffe of Heritage Solutions completed an archaeological assessment of a new road proposed to link Westchester Drive to Churton Park. The road passes across a narrow twisting valley holding the Porirua Stream (Fig. 1). In 1841 the valley floor was the burial place of a European woman and her baby, the event documented in contemporary journals: “burred with oute the burial service” (see O’Keeffe 2009).

The site of the grave is also remembered by older Glenside residents (Glenside Progressive Association web site). The history and assessment of the grave location is given in Appendix 1 to this report taken from Mary O’Keeffe’s (2009) assessment.

In 2009, Mary O’Keeffe commissioned a magnetometer survey and also used a hydraulic digger to scrape down the small key area in the route of the road. No grave was found. I assisted Mary with this scraping. Figure 2 shows the general area before road preparation.

As Mary has emphasised, the objective of the archaeological work was to ensure that the grave is not on or under the route of the road earthworks; it was not an attempt to find the grave if it is outside the area of the earthworks of the road.

This monitoring work was carried out prior to the full earthworks for the road on 28 February 2011 (engineers’ test pits only shown as TP on Figure 3) and 29 August to 5 September 2011 with the cooperation of principal contractors Fulton Hogan.

The site area is valley floor next to the Porirua Stream with a steep slope to the west. To the north is a corrugated-iron-clad house with a metalled road beside and some derelict pig pens on a long concrete slab. Otherwise ground cover was grass or mulched blackberry with soil surface showing.

On the east side of the stream is the site of Glenugie House which pre-dates 1900 (O’Keeffe 2009) and is therefore an archaeological site.

Methodology

In February 2011 working with the engineers I test-pitted areas around the corrugated-iron house (TP on Figure 3, see Figure 4). We also test pitted over a wide area on the knoll or ridge end to the south-west end of the area scraped in September 2011. No trace of a grave was found.

In September, the area covered was the full width of the road (14 m) and an area for a silt trap and hole to bury rubbish from the pigsty area as shown on Figure 3.

The procedure was to strip the topsoil off the surface of the underlying subsoil with the hydraulic digger. The grave should have been dug in a rectangular or semi-rectangular

outline into the subsoil and then filled in with a mixture of subsoil and topsoil. When the surface of the subsoil is revealed the outline of any grave should show. Examples of scraping producing regular outlines in the subsoil surface are shown in Figures 5 and 6.

There is a possibility that the grave was shallow and/or irregular in outline. It is also possible that, if shallow, it might have been disturbed. For this reason, I kept a close watch for any bones in the topsoil and any disturbances in the subsoil.

Results

A total area of about 1600 m² was scraped down as shown in Figure 3.

Typical soil profiles were as follows:

Depth below surface (cm)

0-15 Grey loam topsoil often with rubbish including plastic

15-20 Grey sandy clay subsoil

20- Yellow-brown sandy clay subsoil with angular gravels at foot of steep slope, sometimes with intrusive rubbish pits and fence post holes

There was much fill and landfill with road metal, rubbish and concrete on the margins of the stream. One of the test pits carried out in February 2011 (Fig. 4) showed that the topsoil had been buried by fill cut for the platform on which the corrugated iron house had been built.

Figures 7-10 show a sequence of areas photographed from the raised bucket of the digger.

Some areas with semi-rectangular areas of grey subsoil in the surface of the subsoil were dug down a further 10-30 cm deep. In all cases the grey or disturbed soil disappeared (see Figs 5, 6).

In one area near the power pole (BBB in Figure 3) bones became exposed in the topsoil. I left these in position and carried on with the scraping elsewhere. I recovered the bone by trowelling the topsoil. It became clear that it was mixed with plastic and that its final deposition must have been in the last 30 years.

The bone is cattle vertebrae and ribs some with cut edges (soup bones) and sheep tibia and part pelvis (hind leg roast) (Fig. 11). There are other fragmentary bones less easily identified. I assume these are cattle or sheep as well. The bones are in storage and fuller confirmed identification by a forensic anthropologist can be carried out if opinion favours this.

Elsewhere in the topsoil there were fragments of late nineteenth-century earthenwares including underglaze transfer prints of “Willow Pattern” and a slate-blue wild rose

pattern (not in figures). These probably relate to settlement and travel through the valley in the nineteenth century.

In the course of the fieldwork I noticed that tree stumps had been dumped and trucks parked on the site of Glenugie House. This is not creating a modification to the site there but it is an example of where ancillary operations should be monitored to ensure that this archaeological site is not modified.

Discussion

As noted above, some older residents remember the location of the grave. Some say that it could be seen across the stream from Glenugie House and others that it lay further to the south on the stream flats. In the course of the stripping of topsoil I have covered all these areas apart from the grove of Lawsonias just south of the corrugated-iron-clad house and the areas nearest the river bank to the south of the area.

Based on my survey of the surface of the subsoil, it is extremely unlikely that there is a grave in the area of the new road alignment.

Although as noted the objective of this exercise has been to reduce the risk of the grave alignment, two issues arise.

- 1) *The grave will be found deeper than the scraping or elsewhere on the road alignment.* The earth-moving contractors Tenga Pickering are aware of the remote chance of a burial site on the road alignment and will contact Duncan Mundell of Fulton Hogan if something is found in the course of future operations.
- 2) *Where is the grave?* I believe it must be in the gently sloping area of about 100 m² in the Lawsonia trees about 20 m south of the corrugated-iron-clad house. The Lawsonias which are about 25 years old may have been planted to mark a derelict grave site (see Fig. 2). Although it is not designated as part of the roadway, as a temporary precaution this area should be marked off with tape to avoid any disturbance from roading operations.

Conclusions

- 1) Stripping of topsoil from some 1800 m² of the new alignment of Westchester Drive under HP authority 2010/ 311 has shown no evidence of the grave of the woman and baby buried in this general area in 1841.
- 2) Normal roading earthworks can proceed on the new alignment.

- 3) The area on the flat in and near the grove of Lawsonia trees is now a possibility for the grave site and should be marked off with tape to avoid any disturbance from roading operations.
- 4) There should be no operations on the site of Glenugie House that will disturb the topsoil there.
- 5) This report should be submitted to the Glenside Progressive Association.
- 6) This report should be submitted in fulfilment of the conditions of HP authority to the regional archaeologist Historic Places Trust.

Appendix 1. Text from O’Keeffe 2009.

1841 Gravesite

An historic grave is reported on the website of the Glenside Progressive Association, as being on the rural block of land known as Waitakaro, on the corner of Glenside Road and Stebbings Road. “The grave is said to contain the body of a mother and child, the mother dying in childbirth because the roads were impassable due to rain and flooding. Mr Len Stebbing’s (sic), whose family resided in the area since 1863, believed that the woman was the first wife of Mr Frank Johnson, of Johnsonville. He surmises that her untimely death resulted in Mr Johnson subdividing Section 24, selling out and relocating to Johnsonville.”⁷ The website also reports the grave as being fenced and well maintained up until the 1950’s. There is independent documentary evidence of the grave. Bishop Selwyn consecrated the gravesite on his first visit to Wellington in 1842. This event is documented in letters written by Mrs Susannah Wall of the first Halfway House, to her sisters in England:

“...the Bishop and severl (sic) church ministers came [in September 1842]...a poor woman at a neighbouring house ad (sic) died in the winter and the rodes (sic) was (sic) so bad at that time she could not be carried down to the burying ground in Wellington and she was burred (sic) with oute (sic) the burial service I told the Bishop and he went with me and the poor womans (sic) husband to the grave and read the burial service I cant (sic) tell you my dear sister how I felt at that time but I dare say you can tell my feelings better than I can express myself...”⁸

7 <http://glenside.wellington.net.nz/index.php>

8 Letter of Susannah Wall, 18 December 1842, ATL

The precise location of the grave could not be verified from documentary sources. Survey plans held by LINZ did not note the grave, nor did the surveyors’ fieldbooks. Births and Deaths registers held by the Alexander Turnbull Library for Wellington do not commence until 1848.

Older local Glenside residents and former residents remember the grave; their memories are shared on the Glenside Association website. Many residents remember the grave as being surrounded by a white picket fence.

The consultant made a site visit on 10 March 2008 to the approximate location of the grave as reported in the Glenside Progressive Association website. There was nothing to see on the ground surface - the vegetation is high grass and blackberry, which obscures the topography.

The likely area of the burial can be determined by some limitations in the landscape:

□ It is unlikely to be located too close to the stream, due to flooding threat.

□ It is unlikely to be located on the steeper slopes on the north side of the valley, as the steep slopes would be an unstable location to dig a hole to bury something, due to slope wash and creep.

□ It is unlikely to be within the area of the stockyards. The burial of course well predates the stockyards, but the yards themselves are unlikely to have been placed with the burial within them.

This therefore leaves a relatively small parcel of land in which the burial may be located, as seen in figure 5.

In order to verify the presence and location of the grave, an application to investigate the site under Section 18 of the Historic Places Act was made by the archaeologist.

This authority was granted (authority 2008/273).

To attempt to specifically locate the grave, the consultant engaged Geometria to

undertake a non invasive ground investigation, using ground penetrating radar. The survey was undertaken using a Fluxgate Gradiometer, which measures small underground magnetic anomalies. Both geomorphological changes and human induced soil changes can be detected. This survey took place on 9 April 2004. An area between the stockyards and the corrugated iron building on site was covered by the GPR survey, including a longer strip along the edge of the stream.

Geometria reported interference in the survey data results from both the corrugated iron building, and from metal within the stockyards⁹.

Geometria did, however, report a possible indication of a grave site. Advice from the local community recounted that the grave site was once surrounded by a cast iron fence, as was common in early historic period burials, but that this had fallen over many years ago. In the immediate area where the grave was most likely to be located, there was a very strong ferrous signature of interest. Cast iron has a particularly strong signature compared to other iron objects. The area of the strong signature at Glenside had a rectangular shape and was of dimension appropriate to fenced grave.

Geometria speculated that the single strong signal may be the accumulated signature of several pieces of cast iron fencing that have fallen inwards over the grave¹⁰.

The target identified by Geometria was tested by ground truthing on 31 March 2009.

As the burial may have been revealed by excavation, a disinterment licence was obtained beforehand from the Ministry Heath.

⁹ Geometria, 2008: 5

¹⁰ ibid: 5-6

The surface vegetation and topsoil was cleared using a small digger with a clean up bucket.

Two areas were cleared:

- The area between the stockyards and the corrugated iron shed, including the target identified by Geometria

- an area south of the stockyards, as one resident was certain he remembered the grave being this far south (in contrast to the memories of the majority of the elderly residents, which placed the grave site further north between the stockyards & iron shed).

In each area the soil was cleared down to the uniform yellow-brown soil layer beneath the topsoil.

No indication of the burial was found. The burial was expected to be seen as a discoloured regular rectangle or oval, in marked contrast to the subsoil. In all cleared areas the subsoil was uniform in colour and appearance.

The target identified in the GPR survey was revealed to be a piece of corrugated iron beneath the vegetation.

It is noted that the purpose of the testing was not to find the grave per se, it was in fact to determine whether or not the grave was located within the road corridor. The archaeologist is satisfied that this testing has determined the grave, if present, is outside the road corridor.

References

Glenside Progressive Association. Web article “1841 gravesite”.

<http://www.glenside.wellington.net.nz/index.php/1841-gravesite-rural-heritage-113.html>

O’Keeffe, Mary. 2009. Extension of Westchester Drive, Glenside, Wellington:
Archaeological assessment. Unpublished report to WCC

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Figures



Fig. 1. Location plan. Areas stripped of topsoil shown in dark pink highlighter.



Fig. 2. The unmodified road route looking north-east with Lawsonia grove and probable grave area at left. Compare with Figure 8.



Fig. 4. Engineers' test pit February 2011 showing yellow-brown subsoil and original grey loam topsoil overlain by yellow-brown fill from clearance of the building platform.



(a)



(b)

Fig. 5 (a), (b). A grey outline in the yellow-brown subsoil surface (top) disappeared when scraped down a further 10 cm (bottom).



Fig. 6. A distinct outline on the upper slopes was a rubbish pit and disappeared when scraped.



Fig. 7. Looking south-west along the road route with the yellow-brown subsoil surface exposed. No grave outline visible. Topsoil at top right past the electricity line is very clear and has yet to be fully stripped.



Fig. 8. Looking north-east along the road route with the yellow-brown subsoil surface exposed. No grave outline visible. Possible grave area in grass at upper left.



Fig. 9. The south-western part of the site area with the yellow-brown subsoil surface exposed. No grave outline visible.



Fig. 10. The silt trap below the road line and by the stream. The only area of intact subsoil is upper left, the rest of the surface is land fill including rubbish, concrete and soil.



Fig. 11. Bones found in topsoil in the power pole area (BB on Fig. 3). Cattle bones at left, sheep on the right.