

Back to her rightful resting place

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FAMILY TRIBUTE: Descendants of Louisa Houlden (from left) Mary Yardley, Brian Yardley, Alan Webb, Elisha and Emily Bain, Evelyn Pert, Carla Pert, Kathy Webb, Alec part and Denis Pert honour the colonial settler at her Makaraka cemetery resting place after the repair and restoration of the headstone. Picture by Paul Rickard

Dedicated family researcher Elisha Bain left her Hamilton home at 4am on Saturday to attend the unveiling of great-great-grandmother Louisa Houlden's headstone, which has been repaired and restored to its rightful place at Makaraka Cemetery.

It was one of 88 headstones removed from burial plots by Cook County Council in the early 1970s and buried in a nearby trench in 1982 as the cemetery was “cleaned up”.

Mrs Houlden, who died in 1932, aged 83, was a prominent member of the Salvation Army and the wider Gisborne community, and was active in the suffrage movement.

About 30 descendants from four generations from Gisborne, Wairoa and Hamilton, including Mrs Bain's baby daughter Emily, and representatives of the Salvation Army, honoured Mrs Houlden at the unveiling.

The Salvation Army later hosted a luncheon for the family.

Mrs Bain said the unveiling was an emotional moment after years of research and determination to return the headstone to their ancestor's grave site.

"We've reached the end after 12 years."

Mrs Bain said her mother, Mary Yardley, did most of the research, while she looked up archives.

But several other family members said it wouldn't have happened without Elisha.

Mrs Houlden's daughter Kate, who died of cancer in 1911, aged 27, rests in the same plot.

Louisa Houlden's parents Thomas and Caroline, a seamstress to Queen Victoria, rest elsewhere in Makaraka Cemetery, as does her baby who died at the age of six months.

Mrs Houlden came to New Zealand with her parents and two siblings.

She had nine children with husband Robert, who later left her and moved to Australia.

Dot McCulloch, of the Friends of Makaraka Cemetery Trust, said 70 remaining headstones dug up from the trench in 2018 had to be restored to their grave sites by the end of June.

A Lotteries Commission grant of \$33,000 and Gisborne District Council funding of \$25,000, along with staff resources, would ensure that would happen.

"Seven are going out in one go next week," said Mrs McCulloch. "We know where all the grave sites are."

The headstone project has progressed through the endeavours of a working group made up of district councillors and staff, Friends of Makaraka Cemetery Trust, Historic Places Tairāwhiti and individuals with a direct interest and connection with the cemetery.

Makaraka Cemetery served as Gisborne's first cemetery from 1860 to 1916.

Gisborne Herald, 6th July 2018, by Winsley Wrigley



Headstone back 'where it belongs'

Family unearthed the story of their ancestors.

HONOURING THE PAST: The headstone of pioneer settlers Edward and Harriet Burch, and their son Edward has been restored and resurrected at their grave site in Makaraka Cemetery after being buried in a trench in 1982. Their descendants have not forgotten them, nor the fate of their final resting places. Three generations of descendants, great grandson Kevin Burch, from Whangarei, his daughter Joanna Burch and grandson Max Plenderleith, both from Te Puke, have repaired and returned the headstone to its original site. Kevin Burch said he wanted to encourage descendants of the other 87 people whose headstones were retrieved from a trench to have them returned to the original sites where their relatives rest. Picture by Paul Rickard

Three generations of the Burch family, from Whangarei and Te Puke, gathered at Gisborne's historic Makaraka Cemetery to honour ancestors dating back more than a century.

Kevin and Judy Burch drove 638 kilometres from Whangarei and have traversed 112 years of history.

They attended the unveiling of a headstone that dates back to 1906 and is the first of 88 buried in a trench 36 years ago as part of a cemetery "cleaning" exercise, to be returned to its original location.

The headstone, retrieved, cleaned and repaired after being buried in 1982, honours Mr Burch's great grandmother, Harriet Elizabeth Burch, who died in 1906, her husband Edward John Burch, who died in 1914, and their youngest child Edward (Teddy) John Burch who died of typhoid, aged seven, in 1896.

Kevin and Judy's daughter Joanna, from Te Puke, and her son Max were also at the unveiling.

Mr Burch said he had a photograph dating back to the early 1960s when the grave site was in excellent condition.

He later heard, after the 1982 "clean-up", that "you couldn't find anything".

He encourages descendants of those honoured by the 88 headstones to have them returned to their original and rightful place.

"I wouldn't want them to be included in a memorial wall".

That is the other proposal and the preferred option for most of the retrieved headstones.

"They should be here," he said as he pointed at other nearby graves.

"It's where they belong."

The couple have put Edward John Burch's age on the repaired headstone, which was omitted in 1914, and added details of Teddy's life.

They have also made the plinth wider to protect the headstone from lawn mowing.

Mr Burch said it was important that he and Judy attend the unveiling, as it was they who compiled the "genealogical research."

Uncovering the district's early colonial history

The headstone, like so many others in Gisborne's cemetery from 1860 to 1916, can lead on to tell much of the district's early colonial history.

They discovered that Edward and Elizabeth Burch came to New Zealand in 1874 from Lancashire.

Their trip was subsidised by the New Zealand Government under the scheme developed by colonial treasurer Julius Vogel to attract large-scale migration from Britain.

They chose to settle in Gisborne because of the Poverty Bay Commission coercing land from Maori owners for European settlement soon after the Waerenga a Hika seige.

It was a time when the balance of power in the district had swung from the situation of a few Pakeha settlers living here on Maori terms, to a situation where land was being bought and developed by the settlers.

"As descendants of these early settlers, we acknowledge with regret the tragic and unjust events that occurred at Waerenga a Hika in 1865," said Mr Burch.

“At the same time, we recognise that this event made possible our families’ lives here.”

Edward and Harriet Burch, and four children, were living at King’s Mill, Makauri when they were struck by a flood in 1876.

They lost everything but managed to reach the Roseland Hotel in a boat.

Edward was likely the mill’s saw doctor and mechanic.

Later, Edward was working at the Waitangi oil springs, at Whatatutu, where they were again made homeless when their house burned.

They moved to live in Gladstone Road, where Edward held municipal contracts for collecting and burying the residents’ night soil, delivering water and, in summer, spraying water on the roads.

He had a gunsmith business, which included tool sharpening and mechanical repairs, as well as a water tank cleaning, well-sinking and chimney-sweeping business.

In those days, when professional nurses were few and far between, Harriet Burch took up nursing and was a friend to many grateful mothers, who could testify to her unselfish kindness and skill, which was the result of much experience. She had 12 children herself, six sons and six daughters, and adopted several others.

Harriet supplemented the family income by doing the washing for other households.

The Burch daughters married into the Ellisdon, O’Neill, Knowles, Jones, McKinley and Saunders families.

Many of these families were also early settlers in the Gisborne area and there could be descendants living here.

Kevin and Judy Burch also planned to visit the graves of two of Edward and Harriet’s sons, who are buried in Taruheru Cemetery.

Historic Places Tairāwhiti is looking into the possibility of seeking funding to help descendants of people whose headstones have been recovered with the cost of headstone reinstatement.

“We are pleased that funding will be sought to assist with reinstatement of the headstones”, Mr Burch said.

“Although the cost is not great, for some families it may be out of reach.”