



NEARLY THERE: Bay Stonecraft staff members (from left) Robert Porter, Colin Duffy, Gareth Porter, David Porter uplift one of the last of seven headstones to return it to its gravesite at Makaraka Cemetery. Right, a 2018 file photo of Currie Construction and Gisborne District Council workers removing one of the 88 Makaraka Cemetery headstones from where they were buried in 1982.

Stonecraft picture by Liam Clayton



TALES FROM THE PAST: Friends of Makaraka Cemetery Trust chairwoman Dot McCulloch and fellow trustee Gavin Bull with Mrs McCulloch's first book telling the tales of some of those who rest in Makaraka Cemetery. More copies of the book have been printed.

File Picture

'A WRONG PUT RIGHT'

Headstone restoration project on home stretch

by Wynsley Wrigley

MAKARAKA Cemetery is starting to fill up. So says Friends of Makaraka Cemetery Trust chairwoman Dot McCulloch. She was referring to the last seven of 88 headstones buried in a trench in 1982, which are being returned to their grave sites within the next two weeks.

The other 81 headstones have been restored — some having needed more work than others — and returned to where they belong in the past two years since they were dug up.

Mrs McCulloch's knowledge of those at rest in Gisborne's first cemetery, which dates back to 1860, is extensive.

She points to one grave to her left and says the woman was the last survivor of her family as her two sons were killed in World War 1.

Turning to her right and pointing at a "chunky" headstone, she says it is the final resting place of a Norwegian man who drowned at Midway Beach while saving two children before the first war.

She wonders out loud if the descendants of the two children know they owe their very existence to the Norwegian.

Three different stonemasons have worked on restoring the 88 headstones after they were uplifted from the trench.

When The Herald visited, staff from Bay Stonecraft were moving the last seven headstones.

They are using a small trailer and the headstones are ratcheted on in a system devised

by David Porter, the father of one of the Bay Stonecraft staff members.

The headstone is heavy. It takes some manoeuvring to get it on to the trailer, which the four men push hundreds of metres to the grave site from which it was removed in about 1973 by Cook County Council as they "cleaned up" the cemetery.

All 88 headstones were buried in 1982 to prevent damage or vandalism. "The job is progressing well," said Mr Porter. "It's been fun, I've enjoyed it."

The restoration project has been a team effort from a working group made up of Gisborne District Council elected members and staff, Friends of Makaraka Cemetery Trust, Historic Places Tairāwhiti and individuals with a direct interest and connection with the cemetery.

The council has contributed staff resources and \$25,000 towards the restoration while the New Zealand Lotteries Commission granted \$33,000.

Individuals and families, some travelling from other districts, have honoured their ancestors by restoring their headstones and telling their life stories.

Mrs McCulloch has published one book about those who rest in the cemetery and plans another.

Her first book sold out its entire run of 100 copies and a second run of 30 has just been published.

Historic Places Tairāwhiti is another good source for historical information about the cemetery.

Mrs McCulloch is not related to anyone who rests in the cemetery

Her interest was raised by fellow members of the Gisborne Genealogy Group who have family members buried there, and by other relatives approaching the society in an attempt to have the headstones raised.

That led to the formation of the Friends of Makaraka Cemetery Trust, who also have a role

in maintaining the cemetery.

There are still 500 headstones missing. It is believed they were made into rubble and used to fill in Houhoupiko Stream.

Restoring the 88 retrieved headstones had been a 13-year project, said Mrs McCulloch. It was a wrong put right.

After the last seven headstones are in place at their gravesites "we'll all have a party".