

20/183

Horail 13/4/80

Council keen to cut cemetery losses

Editor,"
tremb-
We have
last rest-
our loved
Waikumete
... I do not
Bicycle tracks
those graves."
much brisker hand-
another protester
it is disgraceful the
the Auckland City
Council plans to desecrate
Waikumete memorials
which people have paid for.

Both letter writers have
mistaken the council's
wishes for its intentions.
In fact, the council is not
planning to demolish head-
stones or monuments, be-
cause it has very little
power to.

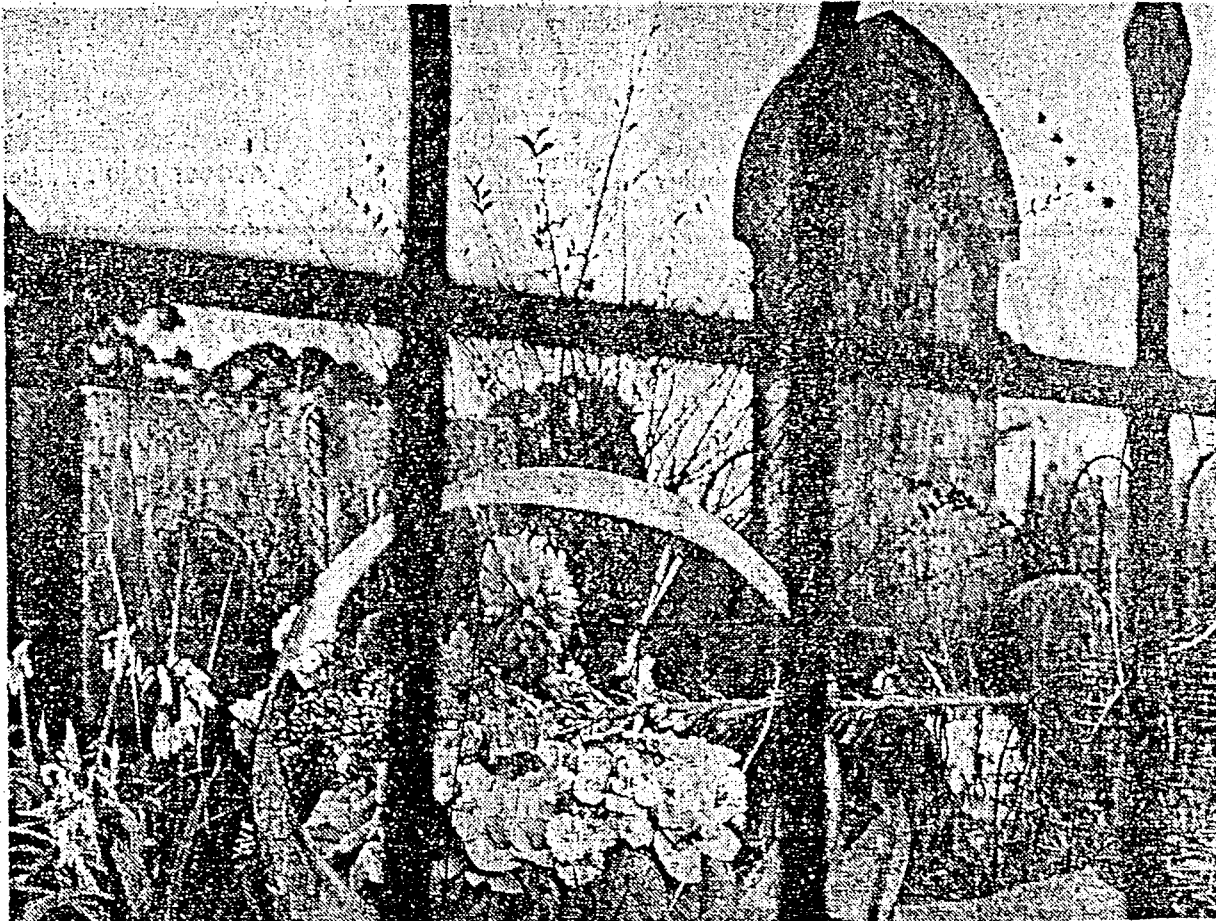
What the city parks and
reserves committee wants
is a change in the law that
would allow the council to
remove gravestones and
monuments from the old
part of Waikumete
Cemetery.

The reason is simply that
Waikumete loses money —
only \$144,900 last year —
and the committee thinks
it would cut its losses if
mowing machines could be
hailed straight back and
forth across the old part of
the cemetery instead of
having to be jiggled around
every grave.

As it is, the city council
and every other council
that runs a cemetery is
trapped by the law on
cemeteries.

The council drew the
laws of the trap even tight-
er on itself when it decided
last century to sell burial
plots outright rather than
sell 60-year rights, as it
does now.

But although in the old
part of Waikumete the
council sold off the land it
could not also get rid of its
obligations. Nor did any
duty fall on the new
owners.



● Waikumete Cemetery . . . selling burial plots outright proved a trap for the city council.

The council is still forced
to keep graves in order
and if it falls the Depart-
ment of Health can send
men in to tidy or repair old
graves and then bill the
council for the work.

If, for example, the
owner of a burial plot puts
a life-size marble angel on
top of a wobbly, 10-foot
column to the peril of what
the Burial and Cremation
Acts calls "persons fre-
quenting" the cemetery,
there is no way the council
can force the owner to
make the angel safe.
Instead the responsibility
falls on the council. The

law gives it two choices:
make the angel safe or
take it away.

Is it unjust to load
every cemetery-owning
council with all the re-
sponsibilities but almost
none of the rights of own-
ership?

If this is injustice, it is
also a dry-eyed view of
family piety. Up in the old
part of Waikumete where
turn-of-the-century graves
are just the latest thing,
there is almost no sign of
private maintenance.

At the head of one grave
someone has scooped out
trowelfuls of squishy Wal-

ikumete clay, spread some
potting mix and put in
some seedlings.

On another grave stands
a plastic bowl with a twig
in it.

Otherwise it is all mun-
icipal maintenance.

The results may look like
a prison haircut but the
mowing that the disused
corner of the cemetery gets
is obviously more frequent
than the maintenance given
to many a living rate-
payer's footpath.

If the parks and reserves
committee ever wins a law
change that lets it clear

the old part of the
cemetery, it will take a
long fight.

First the Municipal Assn
must be persuaded to
ask the Minister of
Health to rewrite the law.
If he agrees he must con-
vince his colleagues that
the idea is worthwhile
even at the cost of annoy-
ing some voters.

In the meantime the city
council is checking the bur-
ial records for the old part
of the cemetery to make
sure that all the plots in
the city and Glen Eden en-
closed by the cemetery have been
used.