

LEISURE

Of passing interest

Historic features in our landscape observed by Puke Ariki director **Kelvin Day.**

Hurdon cemetery, New Plymouth

There are a number of small cemeteries in Taranaki. Some are in rural settings while others are part of the cityscape of the region's towns. The Hurdon cemetery in New Plymouth is one of the latter. The cemetery owes its origin to Peter Elliot who took up a section of land in the area in the early 1850s. In 1853 he donated a small piece of land to the Primitive Methodist Church so that a chapel could be built. The first service in the church was held on Sunday, August 14, 1853, the preacher in the afternoon was Mr Long while the evening service was conducted by Mr Groube. A school was also established about the same time.

This chapel served the local Hurdon community until it was shifted to Inglewood, probably in the mid 1870s. Over the years, as so often happened, the cemetery became overgrown and for some years Victor Davies, at his own expense, had men from his nearby



plant nursery clean it up. In 1983, thanks to the generosity of a member of the Cowling family, a memorial gateway to the cemetery was erected. While there are several prominent settler family names recorded on the headstones, one headstone in particular reminds us

of a notorious incident in New Plymouth's history during 1892-93. This is the headstone of Robert Wallath, the so-called New Plymouth "Highwayman", who conducted a series of robberies wearing a bizarre disguise. After being captured and unmasked,

Wallath, then aged 21, was sentenced to eight years at Mt Eden jail but following petitions from several New Plymouth residents, he only served four and a half years. He returned to New Plymouth where he became a well-respected citizen who died on July 24, 1960.