



National Graves Project

Restoration Guide



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Introduction



The National Graves Project aims to see volunteers transforming cemetery sites all over New Zealand. We hope this practical guide will inspire you and others to get stuck in.

The inspiration for this project started when a Porirua historian shared a story of a deceased local war veteran via his website. An ex-Army Major and member of the Titahi Bay RSA, decided to visit the grave site. Noticing how poorly maintained the site was, he returned with a bucket and scrubbing brush and started cleaning. He soon realised the cemetery included many more returned services graves and the vast majority of them were poorly maintained. Enlisting the help of another pair of hands, they got busy and uncovered many more stories and restored well over 80 service graves.

Through trial and error, this small team learned how to clean a wide range of headstones, plaques and memorials. They also learned more about their local military history and were able to share this with others in the community through public re-dedication services, cemetery tours and social media updates.

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GETTING STARTED

Firstly, identify if the cemeteries military graves fall under the care of:

- Private property (managed by your local council) or,
- Ministry of Veterans' Affairs or,
- Ministry of Culture and Heritage.

The following pages will help you determine who is responsible for what and will make it easier to determine if funding is available to assist with any restoration efforts.



Council Cemeteries

Cemeteries owned and managed by the local council often have rules as to what they will and will not do to maintain the cemetery. Most commonly, graves in these cemeteries are private plots and considered the responsibility of the family to maintain. This can present a challenge when seeking permission from family members to restore the grave.

Councils do not keep records of family contact details and due to privacy, cannot release the information even if they do hold records.

Service Cemeteries

Veterans' Affairs (VA) look after Service Cemeteries and Memorials. They fund over 100 service plots in cemeteries which are intended to be maintained by councils. VA They offer contributions towards memorial plaques and headstones (if they are broken, damaged or incorrect). They do however require the military grave in question to be for a veteran with qualifying service.

They will provide the following:

- the memorial
- its installation, and
- updates of the plaque for spouses or partners also interred.

When they're buried in a public or private cemetery they can contribute up to \$1,000. Plaques and headstones are standardised in both inscription and design for reasons of equality and uniformity. Personal inscriptions can't be added to memorials in Service Cemeteries.

Often the maintenance and establishment of Service Cemeteries are shared between Veterans' Affairs, local councils, RSAs, and other interested Veteran groups. Whilst they do fund some maintenance and improvements, much of this work is done by volunteers.

Contact Veterans' Affairs: 0800 483-8372

Commonwealth War Graves

Ministry of Culture and Heritage (MCH) are responsible for maintaining and managing new memorial projects including:

- War and historic graves
- National monuments
- National Memorial Park
- Research
- Administration of legislation and grants
- Writing and publication of New Zealand history and reference works

MCH look after monuments and Commonwealth War Graves. There are 3400 of these in New Zealand. These are casualties from WW1 and WW2 who died after the conflicts. These soldiers died before 1923 and 1946 respectively. Outside of this, war graves are considered the responsibility of councils and families.

Contact MCH: (04) 499-4229

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ENLISTING BUSINESS SUPPORT

Because individual clean up projects are centered on a particular location, it is quite often possible to get local businesses to support your project, either in the form of donated supplies / services, money or volunteering.



Who might be able to help?



Local RSA



Funeral Directors



Corporate Volunteers



Local Hardware Store

Your Local RSA

Hopefully your local RSA will be keen to support you and your project. You may be able to use them as an umbrella organisation to your project, which can make it easier to receive funding too. Often members of the RSA are wanting to get involved and as such can be used as part of a volunteer team to assist with the restoration work.

Funeral Directors

Local funeral directors can be very supportive of the restoration efforts and can often provide excellent discounted services. They can be particularly helpful if the cemetery you are restoring has headstones with lead lettering as these need to be professionally restored. They can also provide stone poppies or replacement plaques.

Corporate Volunteers

Many corporate organisations provide their staff with paid volunteer days (e.g. Z Energy), consider approaching organisations such as these in order to promote your project and gain additional volunteer support for restoration efforts.

Local Hardware Store

There are a few cleaning supplies which are needed. Approaching your local hardware store with a story of what you are doing might help you obtain some of these supplies at a discounted rate, or even for free.

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GETTING YOUR TEAM TOGETHER

You do not need tons of people and can realistically get away with just a couple of keen individuals who are passionate. All too often these projects are never started because a committee have over complicated it. If it's only two or three of you at this stage, then just get on with it. Others will come on board once you get started.



Simon Strombom & Melanie Macdonald of the Titahi Bay RSA

Engaging an historian with your project

It's a good idea to enlist the help of a local historian who is willing to take the time to investigate the individuals you come across.

The stories that emerge will give you and your followers inspiration and motivation during this journey. Undoubtedly, they will help you uncover hidden gems of local history and guide you throughout your project.

The stories will give depth to your project and will capture the attention of local and possibly even national media.



Allan Dodson - Porirua War Stories,
www.poriruawarstories.com

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NOTIFYING THE COMMUNITY AND RELATIVES

Meet with local council staff



Porirua Mayor Mike Tana and City Councillors

Arrange a meeting with council and see if they have any interest in supporting your project. Some councils will ignore you, while others may come to the party and get involved. If the plan is pitched as a part of the RSA National Graves Project, you might be surprised. You are at least letting them know what you are up to. When media get on board, its likely your local mayor or Councillors will jump at the chance to support the good work you are doing.

Finding relatives

Finding relatives can be a challenge. Often extended family have long since moved out of the district. You do have a responsibility to at least try and let people know you are going to work on cleaning up some graves. At best, you will get some support. At worst, no-one responds, in which case we suggest you do it anyway.

Social media

Social media can be a useful tool to use when trying to track down family members. Often posting on local RSA pages or local community groups can assist in getting the word out when seeking family members.

Local media

Local newspapers may publish stories and articles about your project which can help you notify the public and find family members or relatives.

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IDENTIFYING & RESTORING GRAVES

There are a range of different types of graves that require various cleaning or restoration methods.



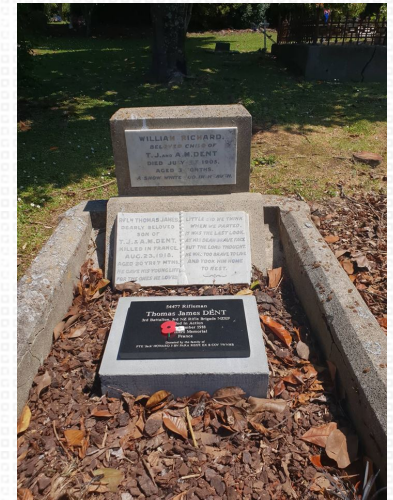
Granite Military Grave with Granite Plaque for Wife



Bronze Plaque and Concrete Military Grave



Granite Memorial Cenotaph



Parents Marble Grave with Lead Lettering and Granite Plaque for Serving Child

General cleaning for all grave types

Step 1

Spray with Bio-Shield. It's a good idea to do one visit where you just identify the graves, spray them and make a plan for what graves you will focus on first.

Step 2

Scrub using a bucket of water and a stiff bristled brush.



Granite graves including cenotaphs'

Step 1

After spraying and cleaning. Using a white water based enamel paint and a 2mm paint brush, paint over the existing lettering and leave for 10 mins to dry.

Step 2

Using a light razor blade scraper, remove the excess dry paint.

Step 3

Using cuttlefish bone from pet shop, clean up detail around the lettering and emblem.



Painting Graves Video



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkQP6Kr2-SY>

Marble Graves

Marble graves may need several spray and scrub sessions using Bio-Shield. It is normal for the marble to turn pink or brown as the lichen dies. Eventually the Marble will go white.

Its worth trying to get a stone mason to also be a sponsor for your project. Their services will be required to repair any lead lettering that is broken.



Bronze Plaques



Step 1

Clean the bronze plaque by scrubbing it with water and a medium textured scrubbing brush.

Step 2

Make a paste from white vinegar (1 cup) and table salt ($\frac{1}{8}$ of a cup) and use flour to bind the ingredients and create the paste. It should be the consistency of slightly runny peanut butter.

Step 3

Apply the paste to the bronze plaque with a paintbrush and leave for 2-3 hours. You will notice that the paste turns green as it extracts the patina. **Avoid letting the paste become completely dry as it is difficult to remove when this happens.**

Step 4

Remove the paste using paper towels and scrub clean. Wash with water and a medium textured scrubbing brush.

Step 5

Repeat steps 2-4 three or four times until the bronze is restored back to its original bronze colour.

Step 6

After cleaning the bronze, sand with P220 wet and dry sandpaper.

Step 7

Once the bronze lettering and borders have been sanded, paint in the surface of the bronze using a jet black leather dye (found in most shoe repair shops).

Step 8

When dye has dried, repeat step 7 until the desired colour has been reached. It should take 2-3 coats for this to occur.

Step 9

Sand the bronze lettering once more to ensure it retains its bronze shine and remove any dye that may have covered the lettering or borders.

Step 10

Spray bronze with a clear lacquer finish spray that is suitable for copper, bronze and similar alloys.

Step 11

When spray has dried, repeat step 10 a couple more times to provide a good protective layer.

Step 12

Wax the bronze plaque using a soft brush to apply the wax and a soft cloth to polish it. Recommended you use a polish wax that contains carnauba wax.

Bronze Restoration Video



<https://youtu.be/1cz8HkTxvgo>

Tools and Materials



Carnauba wax



220 grit sandpaper



Leather dye



Lacquer



Bucket, soft cloth, paper towels, scrubbing brush



Razor blade



Various paint brushes



Cuttlefish bone



Enamel paint

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KEEPING TRACK AND RECORDING EVIDENCE

Keeping track of what you have done, helps you easily share your progress and evidence with others and protects you if anybody is concerned about any damage made to a headstone.

Smaller Cemeteries

If you are only working with a small cemetery and 5-6 graves then we recommend recording the cemetery and number of graves completed as well as taking simple before and after photos. (If you are socially savvy, these can be posted on the NZ Remembrance Army Facebook page.)



NZ Remembrance Army

PROTECTING NZS MILITARY HERITAGE

Larger Cemeteries

If you are working with a town or city cemetery with more than 15 service graves, you will need to be more methodical and planned in your process. These sites are likely to take multiple days and keeping track of progress is important. We recommend obtaining a site map from the council and setting up a spreadsheet / register and recording your plan and progress as you go.

Your register should include fields such as:

plot number, name, service number, rank, served where, general notes, cleaned Y/N, photo Y/N, type (bronze, granite etc)

Plot #	Name	Service #	Rank	Served where	Notes	Cleaned	Photo	Type

Archway - NZ Archives Portal (www.archway.archives.govt.nz) is a great place to find service details of WW1 Veterans.

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MEDIA & TOURS

Letting the local media know about your project can be useful for spreading the message further to reach family or relatives. Media exposure can also help you engage other volunteers, dignitaries and corporate support.

We recommend getting started with the cleaning first and when you have some good photos and a few stories contact your local newspaper and tell them what you are doing.

The National Graves Project falls under the activities of the NZ Remembrance Army which is a newly established group with a focus on protecting NZs Military Heritage. The NZ Remembrance Army is supported by the RSA and other veteran organisations.

Local Tours

If you do engage a local historian / researcher, running a local tour on a significant day like Anzac or Armistice day can really help engage your community in your project.

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MORE HELP AND INFORMATION

Contact RNZRSA
enquiries@rsa.org.nz
04 384 7994



This project has been sponsored by Bio-Shield who provide the highest quality product which has delivered outstanding results for volunteers cleaning concrete and headstones.

To apply for your free Bio-Shield please complete the online form here:

www.rsa.org.nz/application-bio-shield

We recommend you follow and share the [NZ Remembrance Army facebook page](#) and let others know about your plans and progress. This will help inspire others and help ensure groups in the same district can work together.



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This guide was developed by the RNZRSA with the help of a few key people who saw an opportunity to take action and make a difference. The RNZRSA would like to specifically acknowledge the pioneering volunteer efforts and vision of:

Former Army Major - Simon Strombom

Bronze Plaque Extraordinaire - Melanie Macdonald

Porirua Historian - Allan Dodson of Porirua War Stories

Your efforts will inspire many.