

Waterton Cemetery

By John Keast - Down a grassy tree-lined path, and within sound of the sea, is one of Ashburton district's prettiest and possibly least-known cemeteries. The square cemetery is itself bounded by trees and has but six rows of graves.

This is Waterton, a resting place by the sea, at the bottom of Grahams Road.

There is no sign to alert visitors, just two gates.

Beside the cemetery is sunken wasteland.

A focal point for visitors is a tall monument with a wooden cross in a wooden circular frame.

A small plaque reads: Dedicated to all those lost at seas.”

It is believed to be dedicated to the two people killed when three small ships were wrecked at nearby Longbeach in the late 1800s. One of the ships is believed to be the schooner Wild Wave, which went ashore north of the Ashburton mouth in 1875 in a south-east gale. It had a crew of four and was carrying ballast and timber. Timber from the wreck is believed to have been used for a farmer's yard.

The ships are believed to have left Timaru and been caught in a storm.

Two were refloated, and two people died.

Ashburton Museum curator and historian Michael Hanrahan believes an inquest was held at the Somerset Hotel but doubts the victims are buried at Waterton, once home to a hotel and a small village.

Now there is a broken down hall – and the cemetery.

Its little church is now at the Plains Museum.

In a far corner, a low picket fence surrounds several graves, and across from that, a low wrought iron fence protects the remains of Elijah Donaldson, born July 2 1890 and died July 4 the same year.

An inscription says: “ But Jesus said, Suffer little children to come into me for such is the kingdom of Heaven.”

Waterton is home to many tender messages of loss and love.

On the gravestone of John Thomas Soal, who died in 1896, aged 5 and a half, is the inscription: “ Go little pilgrim to thy home on yonder blissful shore.

We miss thee here but hope to come where thou hast gone before.”

And there is another, a farewell to Mary, beloved wife of James Crosson, “who fell asleep, from which none ever wake to weep, a calm and undisturbed repose, unbroken by the last of foes. He giveth his beloved sleep.”

Mr Hanrahan said civil engineer Bob Lindsay was responsible for tidying the cemetery in the 1930s or 40s, clearing it of broom and blackberry.

Now it is a place of beauty and peace and within earshot of a crashing sea.