



### **DANIEL HEENAN'S EARNEST HOPE**

"Go home my friends and shed no tears,  
I must rest here till Christ appears,  
And when He comes I then shall rise,  
And get from Him the Everlasting Prize.  
This is my earnest hope. Daniel Heenan"

The West Taieri Cemetery nestles quietly under the lee of Maungatua, just outside of the Outram township, and contains many and varied burial sites of the early settlers to the West Taieri area. It comes as a surprise, therefore, that in amongst the many modest, and some not so modest, memorials to the hard-working farmers and artisans of the district is a mausoleum of gothic proportions which would not look out of place beside Larnach's tomb in the Northern Cemetery or Daniel Murphy's memorial in the Southern Cemetery.

The following is an excerpt from the notes of the transcriber of the headstones in the West Taieri Cemetery in 1979. The entry was accompanied by a hand-drawing of the mausoleum and can be found at the beginning of the "West Taieri Cemetery, Otago – Headstone and Plan Transcript 1859 – 1979" :

"I have not seen a mausoleum quite like Daniel Heenan's, nor heard a story quite like his, either, so have taken the liberty of trying to depict the edifice, and relate the tale told to me by local folk.

"Daniel was a farmer, and prized the possession of land. He had arranged that on his death, he was not to be buried, but to be laid to rest above ground. This was accomplished by the building of the depicted mausoleum, which contains inside it, clearly visible because of the open wrought-iron work of the door, two concrete shelves. On one of these shelves, in a very plain, shallow, wooden coffin, are the human remains of Daniel. I can't help wondering how long very dry wood can stay in the form of a coffin, while borer busily devour it? The remaining shelf was to accommodate Daniel's friend.

"Together, when Christ came to the earth for the second time, Daniel and Friend, as believers in God, would rise up as promised. Logically, as they were not beneath the ground to start with, they would be the first to "arise" and in that instant, they would claim all of the good Taieri land they desired, before the "others" appeared.

"Daniel departed this life first, and duly took up his place on a shelf, but his friend's wife would have none of this nonsense and saw to it that on becoming a widow, her husband was decently buried in the accepted manner. So the second shelf remains vacant and presumably Daniel is free to claim all the Taieri land he desires, without the need to share!"

Even though the transcriber of the above admits she did not endeavour to substantiate any part of the story as told to her, by delving into past records it is clear that this account is very close to Daniel's final wishes.

Daniel Heenan was born in 1835, the fifth of thirteen children born to Dennis and Johanna Heenan, who had emigrated to New Zealand from Birr, Ireland, in 1850 on board the "Mariner". He and several of his brothers spent time on the Australian goldfields, returning to Otago in the 1860s to take advantage of the cartage opportunities offered by the Tuapeka and Dunstan diggings. When the gold rush days were over, according to the Cyclopaedia of New Zealand, "Mr Heenan afterwards built and conducted the British Hotel in Dunedin, but sold out, and settled at Maungatua,

where he has freehold and leasehold land, and follows pastoral pursuits." He was a very religious man and followed closely the dictates of the Christadelphian sect.

When he died in 1898 he left behind a very long and complicated will dividing his estate amongst his friends, siblings and their children (he had never married or had children himself). In nearly every instance these bequests were tied up with conditions which if not complied with usually meant the bequest would default to the Christadelphian Mission in Birmingham for the benefit of destitute Jews. In amongst these bequests his long-suffering executors (Gilbert McDiarmid and William Charles Snow) found that they were also responsible for the construction of a "vault to hold my body ... the dimension shall be 14 feet by 12 feet by 18 feet in height, the walls shall be 2 feet in thickness of good Portland cement built upon a good rock foundation and with cement benches in the vault to accommodate any of my friends or relations as well as myself." He also directed that his body should be enclosed in a leaden coffin. For the purchase of the cemetery allotment and the building of the vault he allocated his executors 525 pounds.

To this day, a very small frail wooden coffin sits in splendid isolation on a shelf in Daniel Heenan's vault in West Taieri Cemetery waiting for ....