

Introduction

Between the middle years and end of the nineteenth century a series of gold rushes, predominantly located around the edges of the Pacific Ocean (hence the ‘Pacific Rim Rushes’), created the opportunity (or at least its illusion) for individuals to amass rapid personal wealth. Beginning in California in 1849 thousands of people in pursuit of this dream followed the rushes in a ‘human tsunami’ that was ‘clump migration on a massive scale’ (Belich 1996: 346). This tsunami hit New Zealand in mid-1861 after a Tasmanian prospector, Gabriel Read, found gold at Tuapeka in inland Otago, now the site of the town of Lawrence. This monograph considers the lives and experiences of some of the individuals who arrived at the Tuapeka goldfield but never left; they died there and were buried in the local cemeteries. It is not a population-scale study of the thousands of gold seekers and camp followers, but rather a detailed examination of just a few people who lived through some of the key events in the history of New Zealand. Individual stories can get lost in grand narratives, but are critical to understanding the human experiences of those events and making them relatable to audiences today.

The nineteenth century was a time when modern social welfare was absent; the world’s first government-funded old age pension was introduced in New Zealand in 1898 (*Old Age Pensions Act* 1898), and self-reliance was essential for simple survival. In Britain and Europe, changes in agriculture reduced employment opportunities in rural areas and the growing industrial cities created slum conditions for working class families, while in China a series of wars and concomitant famines left many rural poor starving, and fathers and sons looked abroad for opportunities to feed their families. With few if any social safety-nets for most people, the chance of easy wealth was probably even more attractive than it is today.

The second half of the nineteenth century was also a time of increasing global mobility and communications. Sail and steam ships plied trade routes ever more rapidly with the voyage from Britain to New Zealand falling from over 100 days in the 1850s to 38 days by the 1880s (McLean 2001). Telegraph lines were crossing continents in the 1850s, and increasing numbers of newspapers were being printed, allowing news to travel quicker than ever before. These were essential preconditions for an international gold rush, whereby people could both hear of a gold discovery and rapidly travel to it. It was at Tuapeka in the Otago Province that all of the stars aligned and New Zealand’s first major gold rush sparked into life in June-July 1861 (Pyke 1887). Thousands of men, and more than a few women, flocked into the arid expanse of Central Otago (Figure 1.1, Figure 1.2), and from the beginning of 1866 they were joined by Chinese gold seekers. What were the experiences of these goldfields inhabitants? Did the goldfields provide wealth and comfort or penury and hardship?

Historical sources can tell us much about the experiences of people in this period, but records were often only kept by those with time to spare, a world view to promote, or an eye to their own legacy. New Zealand society was reasonably literate in the 1860s (69% of the population could read and write), newspapers proliferated (44 newspapers were established in Otago between 1860 and 1879) and the Victorians were great bureaucrats leaving behind official records of the gold rushes (*Otago Provincial Council, Votes & Proceedings*, Session XVI 1862; Palenski 2012: 51, 55). But these still only provide a partial picture. More recently the worldwide gold rushes in this period have been heavily mythologised, both as a general source of entertainment (such as the TV series *Deadwood*), and as nation-building exercises (for example, stories of the ‘Fortyniners’ in the USA and the Eureka Stockade in Australia). A number of popular non-fiction works have focused on sensationalised aspects of the rushes, further clouding the picture (for example Eldred-Grigg 2011).

So how can we consider the actual experiences of individual actors of this time? There are many good records of goldfields life written by those who experienced the rushes and their aftermath (e.g. Ayton 1982; Bathgate 1874; Houston 1865; Martin 1861; Pyke 1887), but these only represent the stories of a tiny fraction of the thousands of men and women who joined the rushes, and often deal with particular memorable events. An especially valuable source is the 1911 Gabriel’s Gully Jubilee publication that contains numerous reminiscences of men (only men’s accounts are given, although a few women are mentioned) who took part in the 1861 rush, but a note of caution must be sounded as these were men in their 70s remembering an adventure of 50 years earlier. Throughout, the voices of the Chinese are almost completely silent, with their historical narrative depending strongly on the records of the Presbyterian minister Alexander Don, although more recent scholarship has been addressing this (Boileau 2016; Bradshaw 2009; Butler 1977; Don 1923; Macgregor 2016; Ng 1993, 1995, 2016; Ritchie 1986a, 1986b).

To understand the lives of those who did not leave a record behind we must turn to the archaeological record, and the best way to understand many aspects of past lives is to look at the people themselves. Beginning in 2016, Peter Petchey (Southern Archaeology) and Hallie Buckley (University of Otago) have led a bioarchaeological research project that has studied early European and Chinese burials in cemeteries in Otago: the Southern Cemeteries Archaeological Project. Four cemeteries have been studied: St John’s Anglican Cemetery in Milton (2016), the ‘old’ and ‘new’ cemeteries in Lawrence (2018–2019), and Drybread Cemetery in Central Otago (2020).



Figure 1.1. Contemporary illustration showing ‘Gold-diggers out prospecting’ in the Otago goldfields (*Illustrated London News* 1863).

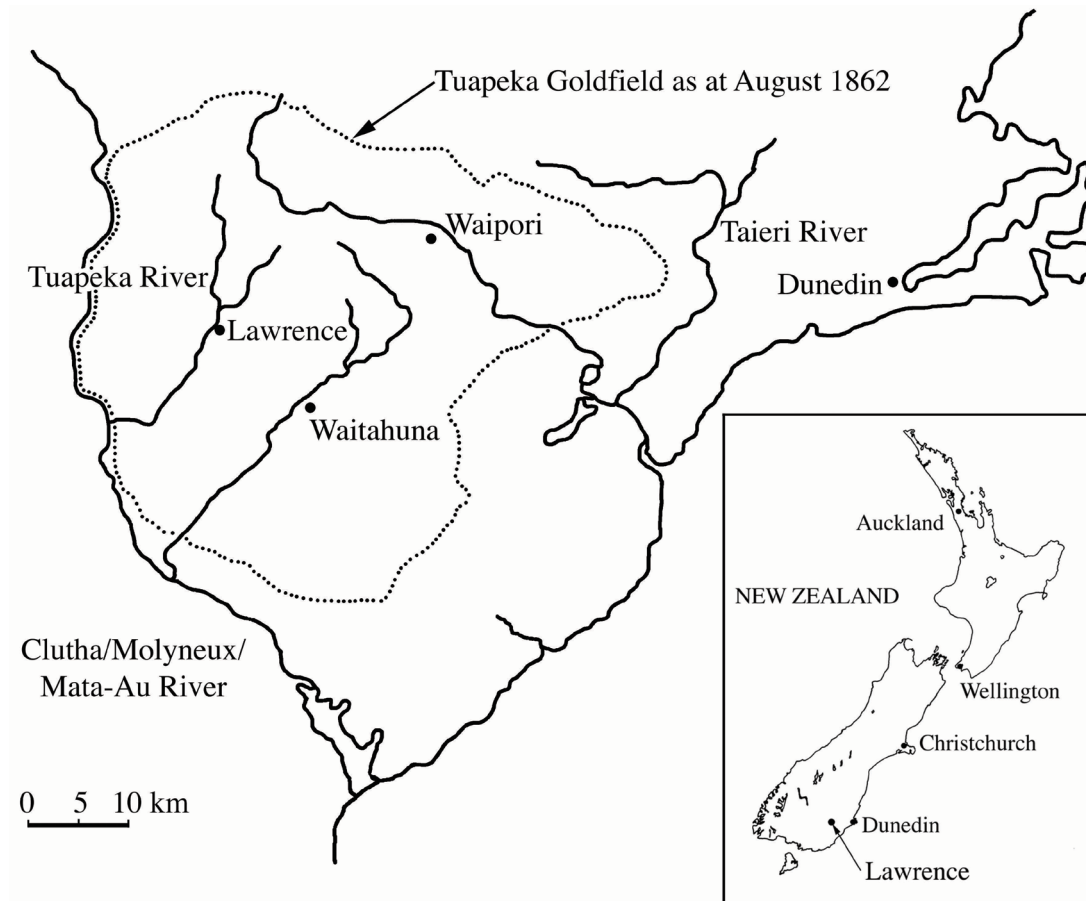


Figure 1.2. The location of Lawrence and the Tuapeka Goldfield in New Zealand.

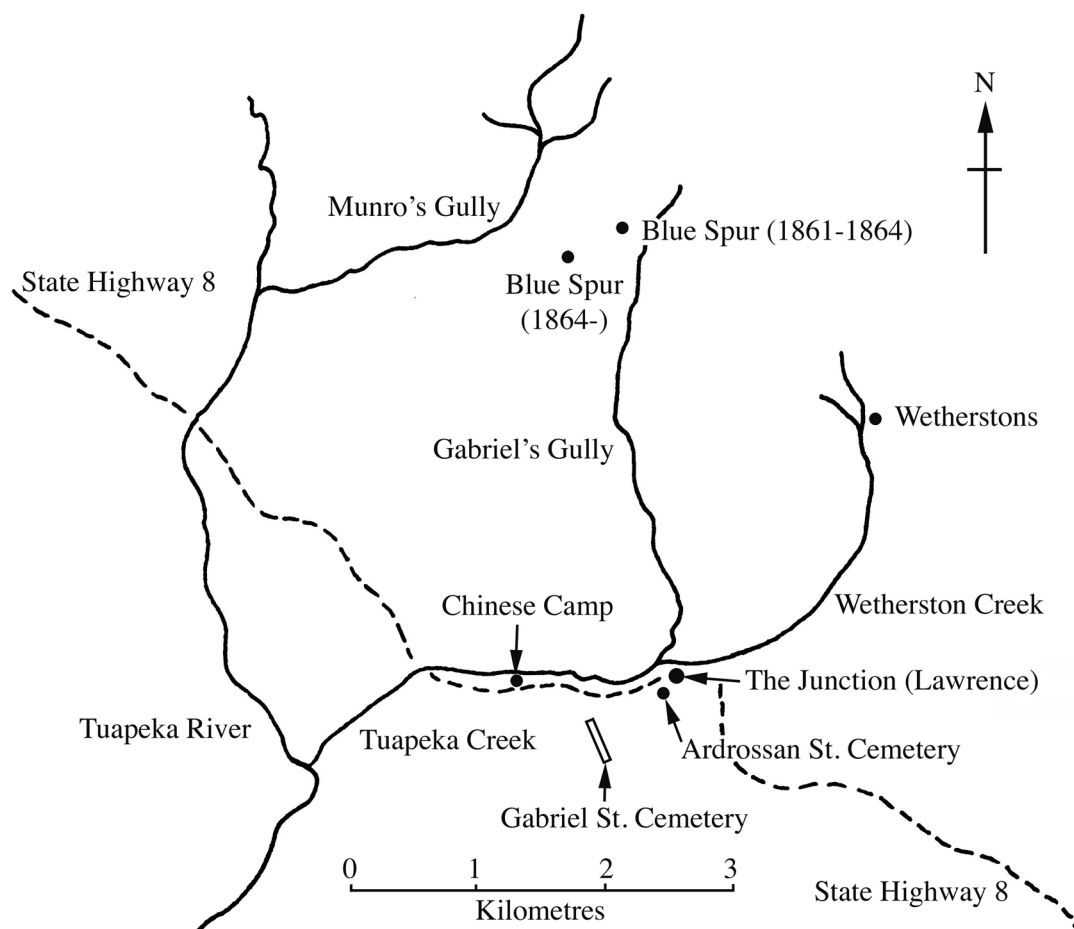


Figure 1.3. The area around Gabriel's Gully, showing the locations of the two cemeteries and other local places mentioned in the text. Note that 'Wetherstons' has had multiple variations in spelling over the years.

The Lawrence excavations are the second phase of the research programme that commenced at St. John's Cemetery in Milton in 2016 (Petchey *et al.* 2022), which is intended to examine the health, wellbeing and society of historic-period settlers in the Otago region. The research applies a 'biocultural' approach that combines biological and cultural information and focuses in particular on human remains and the archaeological evidence of funerary traditions, set within a wider archaeological landscape. From the start of 2019 the research was funded by a Marsden Fund Grant from the Royal Society of New Zealand.

By using a combination of archaeological interpretation of the burial traditions and associated material culture, and analysis of the human remains (including osteological assessment of the remains and chemical and molecular analyses), a detailed picture can be built up of the lives of the individuals: an account of their 'lived experiences.' This integrated analysis can provide details of their origins, childhood and adult health, diet, trauma, exposure to environmental toxins, and in some cases the final cause of death. By building detailed osteobiographies of individual early settlers and combining these with detailed archaeological, historical and archival research we can begin to understand how they experienced the New

Zealand of the mid nineteenth century both individually and as part of an evolving colonial society.

In April 2018 and January and April 2019 the project team carried out a series of archaeological excavations at the sites of the 'old' and 'new' cemeteries in Lawrence, Otago (Figure 1.3, Figure 1.4). As described in detail in this monograph, the nature of the two graveyards was quite different. Ardrossan Street was a frontier cemetery, created out of necessity during the gold rush with little or no formal planning or layout, while Gabriel Street was a formally surveyed cemetery with defined plots and paths and separate areas for different denominations (of which we studied the Chinese). While the differences between these two cemeteries are discussed in detail in this monograph, a simple look at the excavation maps of the two cemeteries illustrate this point at a glance: the Ardrossan Street graves are loosely strung out along the top of a shallow ridgeline, while the Gabriel Street graves are in neatly ordered rows. This is an archaeological study of a rapidly changing frontier society.

The 'old' cemetery on Ardrossan Street is recorded as archaeological site H44/1135, and the 'new' cemetery on Gabriel Street is site H44/1136 (Figure 1.4, Figure 1.5, Figure 1.6). The Chinese section of the

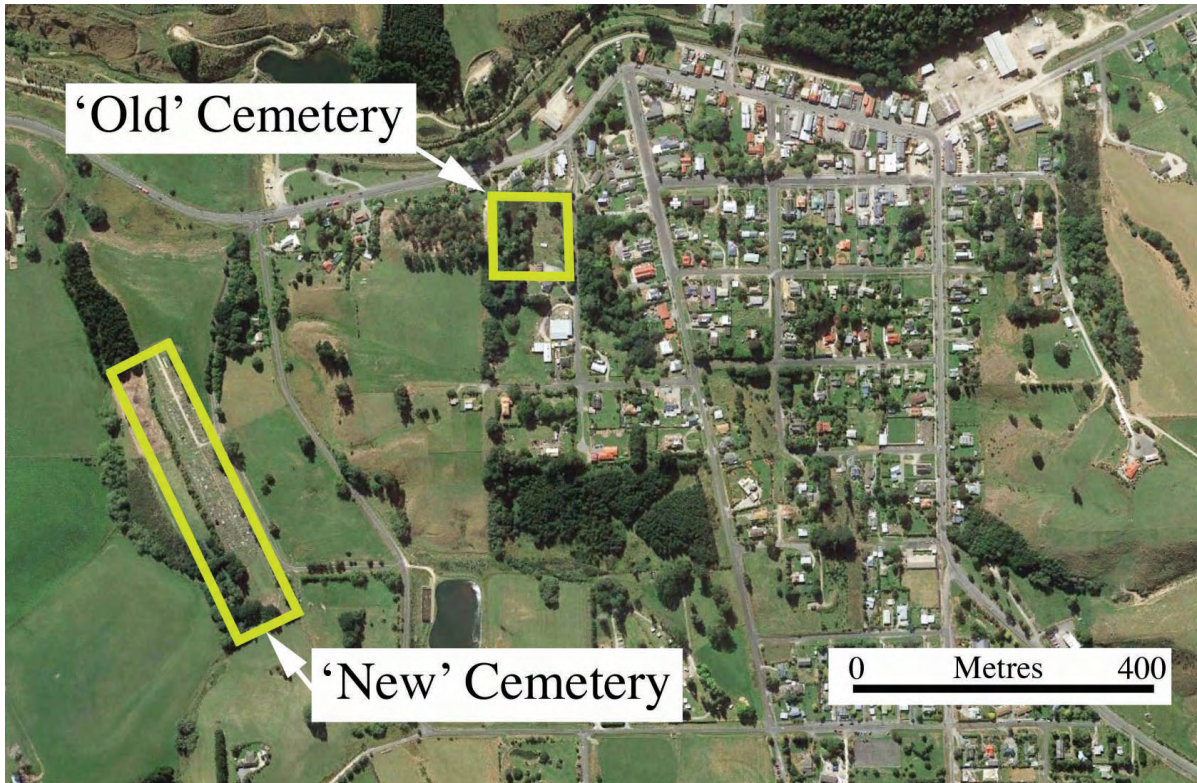


Figure 1.4. The locations of the old (Ardrossan St) and new (Gabriel St) cemeteries in Lawrence, Clutha District, Otago (annotated GoogleEarth image).



Figure 1.5. The 'old' cemetery on Ardrossan Street prior to the excavation starting. Burials were found running down the hill from the left foreground to the right background, with one under the old farm shed.



Figure 1.6. The Chinese section of the ‘new’ cemetery on Gabriel Street. The area investigated is within the old oak trees.

Gabriel Street cemetery (confusingly within what is known as the ‘old’ part of the new cemetery) where the present research is focused is at the southern end where numerous standing and fallen Chinese gravestones are still present (Figure 1.6). The excavations were carried out under Archaeological Authority No. 2018/456 issued by Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga and Disinterment Licence No 09/2018 issued by the Ministry of Health. Extensive consultation was carried out prior to the permissions being sought, including with the Lawrence Tuapeka Community Board, the Otago Southland Chinese Association and Te Runanga o

Otakou. Wider community consultation was conducted through newspaper and other media releases and public meetings in Lawrence in October 2017 and October 2018, and a further public meeting was held in January 2019 (during the first part of the 2019 excavation season) to present preliminary findings to the community. Public talks were also given by team members in 2021 as part of the Lawrence Heritage Festival. After the close of the last excavation a brief report was also published in the local newspaper, the *Tuapeka Times* (Petchey & Buckley 2019). Relevant landowners all gave their permission (Harry & Anne Barnett and the Clutha District Council).

