

Cemetery Conversations

The Newsletter of the Friends of St Kilda Cemetery Inc.

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Sheila Florance: St. Kilda identity and activist

For someone whose remarkable life was in many ways a reflection of St. Kilda - extroverted, eccentric and tumultuous - it is hard to imagine Sheila Florance living anywhere else but the bayside area where she was born. That she was to be buried in the Brighton General Cemetery on her death is out of character for such a proud and passionate St. Kilda resident.

In the fifteenth year after her death many people continue to remember her with fondness. Two aspects of Sheila's life stand out. These are her complex, contradictory personality and her local activism.

Sheila Mary Florance (1916-91) was born at 42 Carrington Grove, East St. Kilda on 24 July 1916, the eldest daughter of James Horn Florance and Frances Josephine née Lalor. Her parents "were unsuited in temperament and needs", their marriage faithful but lacking affection. For such "a tremendously intellectual man", Sheila's father Jimpa had a simple restrained unworldliness. Gardening and the Melbourne Football Club were his passions. Her mother Frankie inherited the Lalor vice with alcohol and an Irish temperament to match. Always well-dressed even when inebriated, she could be a "delightful and funny character" or "fierce when she was in a mood". So it's no surprise that much of Sheila's character came from her parents - a love of gardening, loyalty to her family, a strong sense of dress and a lack of emotional moderation. Sheila's volatility had its positive side. As Helen Martineau writes in her delightful book "On the Inside" (2005), "After a storm the sun shone again. She was onto the next thing. Her friends knew she would soon reverse her behaviour and do something wonderfully kind and generous". One of Sheila's well used quotes was - "Darlings, love is all that matters".



Headstone inscription of Sheila Florance

"That she was to be buried in the Brighton General Cemetery on her death is out of character for such a proud and passionate St. Kilda resident."

After marrying Englishman Roger Lightfoot Oyston (1913-44) in April 1934, Sheila was to spend thirteen years in England, returning to Australia in 1948 as Sheila Balawaider with three children (Susan, Peter and Philip) to her first marriage. Home was to be a derelict 19th century shepherd's cottage in Windsor where present day Montefiore Homes are located and before long, the legendary parties at 'The Hovel' were in full swing. In 1969, the Balawaiders moved to a new flat at 19 Robe Street, St. Kilda and it was here that Sheila became "a lively, often

eccentric, and very vocal protestor over matters affecting her sense of justice". At the top of the list were the gutter-crawlers who used Robe Street in pursuit of amorous adventures. Sheila had a favourite trick in dealing with the problem (when she wasn't being

malicious). Helen Martineau notes that "even in her sixties she had a lovely slender figure without any 'middle-age spread'. She would be out in her garden, often bending over, and when the crawler slowed down she would stand up and turn her crinkly face on them. She always enjoyed the effect of that". And so after years of lobbying, raucous council meetings, Sheila's vigilante action and foolhardy courage, residents eventually succeeded in having the street made into a cul-de-sac.

Sheila Florance gained international fame as an actress in the 1980s. What was it for? To find out the answer, come along to our forthcoming tour of the Brighton General Cemetery to be held on Sunday 19 February 2006. This will be the first time that Sheila's grave has featured in a walking tour. More details can be found inside. (Source: Martineau, H., "On the Inside. An intimate portrait of Sheila Florance" (2005). Copies of Helen's book can be purchased for \$35 plus \$8 postage. For more information visit Helen's website www.helenmartineau.com or write to PO Box 633, Rye Vic 3941)☺



Sheila with grandson Stephen Oyston outside her Robe Street flat

Photo courtesy Helen Martineau

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Petition to close the Cemetery

In the 1860s, three petitions (or memorials) calling on the closure of the St. Kilda Cemetery were presented. This is one of them.

To The Honorable James Macpherson Grant, Minister of Lands & Survey for the Colony of Victoria.

The Memorial of the undersigned Householders, and Residents, of East St. Kilda situate in South Bourke in the said Colony; Shewith.

That the Public Cemetery of the said District is situate between the main Dandenong Road, and the Alma Road, and has been for some years past surrounded by Residences.

That many additional dwelling houses have been recently erected on all sides of such Cemetery, and many other houses are in course of erection in the same locality.

That by reason of the large increase of population in such neighbourhood such Cemetery being in the very centre thereof, is believed by your memorialists to be very injurious to the Public Health.

That many of your memorialists did several years back petition the Government to take measures for closing such Cemetery, but such petition by reason of the then existing state of the law was ineffectual.

That the Public Health Act recently passed, confers on the Governor in Council the power of closing Cemeteries situate as the above described

Your Memorialists therefore most respectfully pray that you will as speedily as may be convenient bring this Memorial before His Excellency in Council with the object of closing such Cemetery as authorised by the above named Act of Parliament.

And your Memorialists will ever pray.

<i>A Michie</i>	<i>D E McDougall</i>	<i>Rob' Turnbull</i>
<i>J B Were</i>	<i>A Kyte</i>	<i>J H Gregory</i>
<i>Abraham Hunt</i>	<i>J A Napier</i>	<i>B E Gray</i>
<i>Henry Davis</i>	<i>W Peterson</i>	<i>Will^m Brook</i>
<i>E S Symonds</i>	<i>G Walker</i>	<i>James Hains</i>
<i>W W Wardell</i>	<i>J T Sargood</i>	<i>T á Beckett</i>
<i>James White</i>	<i>G Y Brind</i>	<i>E Sandford</i>
<i>Alex' Wasey</i>	<i>H Burshart</i>	<i>M Jeffray</i>
<i>W J Beckeld</i>	<i>T W Draper</i>	<i>Henry Hull</i>
<i>W H Nicholson</i>	<i>Thomas Goddy</i>	<i>Will^m Weaver</i>
<i>C P Hackett</i>	<i>F Cook</i>	<i>George Dillon</i>
<i>James McCulloch</i>	<i>A Swrotman</i>	<i>E de Verdon</i>
<i>R N Mompton</i>	<i>A G Harvies</i>	<i>E S Watson</i>
<i>Chas Flaxman</i>	<i>T B Bennett</i>	<i>J H Browne</i>

(Source: Port Phillip City Archives file on St. Kilda Cemetery) 🐾

THE LEWIS FAMILY CONNECTION

A highlight of last November's Equestrian tour was the attendance of Lillian Lewis and Anne Johnson. They are, respectively, the granddaughter and great-granddaughter of Thomas and Martha Lewis who are buried in the Church of England Section "D" of the cemetery.

Thomas and Martha had eleven children. One son was Charles Lewis, the jockey who was killed in a steeplechase accident at Caulfield in 1895 and whose story was featured in the November newsletter. It was through researching the tragic death of Charles, that the Friends came in contact with the Lewis family.

Lillian is the niece of Charles Lewis and the daughter of the famous jockey Robert "Bobby" Lewis, the winner of four Melbourne Cups. Bobby Lewis rode *Phar Lap* to third place in the 1929 Melbourne Cup won by *Nightmarch* and rode over 900 winners before his retirement at the age of 60 in 1938.

Anne is the great-niece of Charles Lewis. Her grandfather, Francis Bullock (who married a daughter of Thomas and Martha Lewis), was also a leading jockey in the first decades of the 20th century. His wins included the Melbourne Cup of 1905 and two Caulfield Cups. He was also very successful overseas winning two *Prix de la Triomphe* Cups in France. He was leading jockey for the German Kaiser Wilhelm for a number of years prior to 1914 and for Lord and Lady Astor in the 1920s in England. But the racing connection does not stop there. Anne's father, Francis Lewis Bullock, was Chairman of the Victoria Racing Club Stewards during the 1960s. 🐾



Anne Johnson (left) and Lillian Lewis (right) at the grave of Charles Lewis
- November 2005.

Do you have an ancestor buried in the St. Kilda Cemetery? Then why not submit a story for publication in *Cemetery Conversations*? Behind every interment is a story worth telling. Contact the Editor if you are interested in having your story published. 🐾



Profiles of the Past: Annie Twomey

Story by Betty Malone, niece of Annie and Jeremiah Twomey.

Annie Twomey *née* Armstrong (1874-1938) was the sixth daughter and tenth child of Charles Clark Armstrong and his wife Mary Ann *née* Newey. They met at Ballarat, where he was driving a Cobb & Co. coach and she was housekeeping for her father and four older brothers. They were married there in 1858. Mary Ann was nineteen and Charles twenty two.

The first four of their thirteen children were born at Ballarat, but after the birth of the fourth child, Charles and Mary Ann took over the management of country hotels in New South Wales and Victoria. In the late 1870s, when they had eleven children, they moved to the south island of New Zealand. They were never wealthy, but living at hotels assured them of adequate food and shelter. The last of their children, a girl and a boy, were born in Dunedin.

They spent a decade in New Zealand and returned to Australia in the later 1880s. Here, with their youngest three daughters and two sons, they settled in West Melbourne. Charles had a secondhand stall in the Victoria market.

Annie completed the last years of her schooling at the nearby Carlton State School. She was a good scholar and was accepted the following year as a junior teacher. She taught at her old school until her marriage in 1903, when she was 29. Tall, assured but kindly, she was a born teacher. Years later, she returned to her profession for a short time. Teachers were in short supply in the late 1930s when she was invited to fill in a vacancy at the Spring Road State School in Malvern.

Jeremiah Twomey (known as Jerry or Jim) was an Irishman who had known the Armstrong family for many years. He was an educated man, much older than Annie and edited a small paper called *The Farmer and Grazier*. They settled in Llaneast Street, Malvern. They had three children - Eileen May, born January 1906, Dorothy Grace, born June 1909 and Kevin William, born March 1912. All three children were educated at the Spring Road school.

Jim Twomey was not a good businessman. After World War I when the paper ceased production, he was nearing retirement age. They moved to a larger house in Wattletree Road where Annie set up a small boarding house, catering for about six to eight boarders. Her tall figure and pleasing personality became well known in and around Glenferrie Road. Everyone respected her and many of her paying guests were young employees from the local banks.

It was a strenuous working schedule, especially during the years of depression and by the late 1930s, Annie's health had begun to fail. She had a bad fall, broke her arm, and never regained full health. By this time, the children were adults and Eileen took control. She closed down the boarding house, bought a small house in Caulfield and she and her parents moved there. Annie, robbed of both health and independence, did not live long. She died in March 1938, aged 64 and was buried at the St. Kilda Cemetery. (Baptist "D" 207A). Her husband outlived her. 🐾



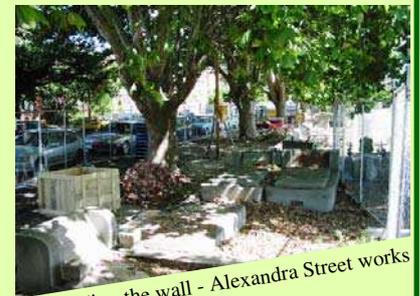
Twomey family grave (Bap "D" 207A)

WHAT'S HAPPENING TO THE WALL?

Readers who have been to the cemetery in recent weeks may have noticed works to the brick cemetery wall along Alexandra Street.

But don't be alarmed! The heritage listed brick wall is being authentically rebuilt to its former details using the existing materials.

The perimeter wall of the cemetery was in poor condition due in part to the invasion of the footings by the roots of the substantial Plane trees at the northern end of Alexandra Street. The City of Port Phillip has



Rebuilding the wall - Alexandra Street works

negotiated an agreement with The Necropolis Springvale to rebuild the wall and undertake remedial action to ensure that it is not affected in the future by root damage.

The works being undertaken include:

- Dismantling the northern section of the wall, installing a concrete pier and beam footing system and then reconstructing the wall to its original specifications.
- Retaining the eight mature Plane trees alongside the cemetery at the Dandenong Road end of Alexandra Street.
- Increasing the width of the existing gravel footpath along the cemetery wall by five metres adjacent to the eight mature trees. While this will narrow the width of Alexandra Street, it will provide additional room for the Plane trees to grow without, it is hoped, affecting the cemetery wall.
- Removal of the fifteen trees closest to Alma Road adjacent to the cemetery wall, to be replaced with twenty Pistachio trees in Autumn 2006. 🐾



Around the Graves

The 74th Albert Jacka Memorial Service was held at the St. Kilda Cemetery on Sunday 15 January. The annual service has been conducted continuously



Geoff Austin laying a wreath at the 2006 Albert Jacka Memorial Service

since 1933, surely a record in Australia. Speeches were made by Cr. Janet Bolitho, Mayor of City of Port Phillip and Tony Lupton, MLA in the absence of Ken Jacka a regular speaker at the event but who was unable

to attend this year's service. Some 90 persons attended the service and it was pleasing to see so many of the younger generation participate.

You heard it here first! For readers with an interest in the legends of the larrikin crook 'Squizzy' Taylor, make a note of this unadorned grave at the St. Kilda Cemetery - Independent "C" grave 044. Thanks to the research of Lois Comeadow, what has eluded researchers for years has now been solved. Whatever happened to Squizzy's father, Benjamin Taylor? He was buried with his parents on 30 May 1901 at the age of 38. 🌹

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations are in order for two of our members.

Helen Harris OAM was elected to the Whitehorse City Council at their elections in November 2005. Helen is a professional historian with a keen interest in heritage issues and is an active cemetery aficionado. She chairs the National Trust's Cemeteries Committee and has conducted tours of Melbourne General Cemetery for over twenty years. All the best, Helen.

The Friends were also delighted to hear that Jane Nigro, stalwart volunteer of the Malvern Historical Society since its formation in 1972, was recently awarded the City of Stonnington's Citizen of the Year 2005 - Art/Culture. Jane has been a tremendous ally of the Friends and assisted greatly with the cemetery tour of Notable Malvern People back in 2002. Congratulations Jane. 🌹

COMMITTEE VACANCY

A casual vacancy exists on the Committee of the Friends and an invitation is extended to any member who may be interested in playing a role in the running of the organisation. The Committee meets on a periodic basis at 5:30pm at the St. Kilda Library and is particularly interested in hearing from members in St. Kilda or surrounding localities.

If you think you may have something to contribute, or would like to discuss the matter further, contact Geoff Austin on 0437 660 758 or by email at gba@melbpc.org.au. 🌹

Forthcoming Activities

Brighton General Cemetery Tour

Sunday 19 February 2006 at 2:00pm

This general tour of the Brighton General Cemetery is being organised by the Friends with the assistance of the Brighton Cemeterians. Numbers are limited so book early to avoid disappointment. Bookings can be made through the Brighton Cemeterians on (03) 9558 4248 or via their website www.brightoncemeterians.org. Tour cost is \$10.00 and includes light refreshments and tour pamphlet.

Sporting St. Kilda

Sunday 5 March 2006 at 2:00pm

Get into training for the Commonwealth Games with a tour of St Kilda Cemetery's sporting identities. St. Kilda's sporting notables include Wimbledon champion Sir Norman Brookes and the extraordinary Joan Richmond, a leading racing car driver in the 1930s.

Parliament, Premiers & Politicians

Sunday 2 April 2006 at 2:00pm

This year is the 150th anniversary of the opening of the new Victorian Parliament. Victoria's very first Premier, William Clark Haines, is just one of a number of significant politicians buried at St. Kilda Cemetery. The tour will feature significant figures in Federal, State and local politics.

Barristers, Bobbies & Beaks

Sunday 21 May 2006 at 2:00pm

St Kilda Cemetery contains Attorneys-General; judges of the County and Supreme Courts and many lawyers associated with famous legal cases including the trial of Ned Kelly. The tour will also feature a number of police officials and is held in conjunction with Victorian Law Week. 🌹

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