Cemetery Conversations

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF ST. KILDA CEMETERY INC.

JAMES PETER QUINN—WAR ARTIST; PORTRAIT PAINTER

By: Elizabeth Hore

One of our most popular tours through the Cemetery is the Artists Tour which visits the graves of many notable artists, including Hugh Ramsay, Sybil Craig, and many more. Unfortunately the grave of James Peter Quinn (CofE “C” 1232) lies in a rather inaccessible section of the cemetery, so for safety purposes and ease of access for a tour group we have not visited it. This has meant that whilst Quinn’s artistic life is equally as interesting as those we visit regularly, his history has fallen into neglect in the Friends’ tours and notes.

Quinn was born in Melbourne on 4 December 1869, the third son of John Quinn, restaurant-keeper born in Antigua, West Indies and his English wife Ann, nee Long. He suffered the misfortune of losing his parents at an early age and grew up with guardians who apprenticed him in his youth to an engraver. He attended classes part-time at the National Gallery of Victoria School under the tutelage of Frederick McCubbin in 1887-89 and at the school of painting under George Folingsby and Bernard Hall in 1890-93. He was awarded several student prizes, including a travelling scholarship in 1893.

In 1894, Quinn took up his scholarship and travelled to London and then Paris where he studied at the Academie Julian and then Academie des Beaux-Arts under Jean Paul Laurens. In 1902 he returned to London and married a fellow art student Blanche Louise Guernier on 29 September. By 1904 he had established himself as a portrait painter and was exhibiting with the Royal Academy in London. Quinn’s family were the subjects of many paintings but his reputation as a sensitive artist resulted in his receiving many high profile portrait commissions, including politician Joseph Chamberlain, the Duchess of York, and later the Duke of Windsor.

In 1918-1919 he was engaged as an official war artist for the AIF in France. During the First World War, following the example of the Canadian and British governments, Australia appointed fifteen artists to depict the war. There was however no overall policy directing the collection of portraits and Quinn, who had an established reputation as a portrait painter, was instructed to make formal portraits of senior army officers. He produced 18 portraits of significant AIF service personnel, mostly generals for the Australian War Memorial’s collection, including General Sir William Birdwood (1918). In 1919 he joined fellow Australian George Coates, working as an official war artist for Canada.

Following the war, Quinn exhibited regularly with the London Portrait Society, the Royal Society of Portrait Painters and the Royal Institute of Oil Painters. His connections with France would be seen exhibit with the old and new salons in Paris.

The sudden death of his gifted artist-son René saw Quinn return to Australia alone in December 1935. He was invited to rejoin the Victorian Artists’ Society (having joined first in 1898) and was its president (but for one year) in 1937-50. However he found this a troubled time as his

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JOAN MARGARET RICHMOND—RACING DRIVER

By: Elizabeth Hore

As the Melbourne Grand Prix 2011 looms and International Women’s Day Centenary (1911-2011) dawns, an opportunity arises to acknowledge the achievements of Joan Margaret Richmond — a “fast lady”.

Few women compete in motor sports, but Richmond was one such woman. She was the first woman to drive in the Australian Grand Prix (a Riley at Phillip Island in 1931) which was followed by an overland drive to Europe, three Monte Carlo Rallies, the Le Mans 24-hour race and winning a 1000-mile race in England during her impressive, though little-known, motor racing career.

Born in Cooma, New South Wales in 1905, but spending most of her childhood near Melton, Richmond was descended from the early enterprising, squatter pastoralist Simon Stauthon, who in the mid 19th century owned much of the land around Bacchus Marsh and Melton, including the famous Stauthon Vale and Eynesbury properties.

Richmond acquired much of her fortitude and skills in the heat, dust and mud of a cattle station that her brother owned near Camooweal in outback Queensland. A keen horsewoman, Richmond had held ambitions to become a jockey but was thwarted when women were banned from professional racing. Her interest in the relatively new sport of motor racing was sparked when in 1926 she purchased a Citroen and twice drove from Melbourne to Camooweal.

Back in Melbourne she began to compete in events conducted by car clubs which were meant to test new cars just as much as their drivers. With relatively few car owners, women were encouraged to participate and become members.

In 1931 at a cocktail party in Melbourne for two English drivers on a world endurance car trip, Richmond and a few female friends thought it might be fun to attempt something similar. And so they drove a total of 13,000 miles over 5½ months from Melbourne to Europe via Sydney, Brisbane and Darwin, then by ship to Singapore. Then on to Calcutta, Baghdad, Cairo and by ship again to Italy. While in Monaco, they participated in the famous Monte Carlo rally in which they finished on time although not in the winner’s circle. Richmond and her companions had mistakenly believed that the winner of the rally would be the team that had travelled the furthest and that coming all the way from Australia they would be bound to win.

Onwards to England, Richmond participated in a number of major car races. In 1932 she and a colleague, took part in the Junior Car Club’s 1,000-Mile Race for stripped sports cars. Held over two days, Joan Richmond and Elsie Wisdom won the race averaging 84.4 mph for the 1,000 miles, the distance being covered in 12 hours 23 minutes and 53 seconds. It was a race in which one driver was fatally killed and in which the great driver Sir Malcolm Campbell, holder of the world speed record, also participated.

During her time in England, Richmond took a job as a trouble shooter for the de Havilland aircraft company in London. She lived in London during the bombing, returning to Australia after the war. In Melbourne she helped organise the production of plywood boats for Benson and Shaw, boat builders.

Described as a tall, graciously handsome woman, she was very fond of animals and worked tirelessly with the Cat Protection Society for many years. She died in 1999 and is buried Bap “A” 208.

(Source: http://www.nma.gov.au)
BURIED IN WOOL—A CASE OF FULL CIRCLE

By: Elizabeth Hore

The Telegraph (UK) on Thursday 9 September 2010 reported that the Prince of Wales displayed examples of "Woolly Coffins" in his garden at Clarence House as part of a 12-day festival to promote green living and the Campaign for Wool.

Whilst it may appear novel today, being "buried in wool" to support the wool industry is not a 21st Century innovation. In 1667 and 1678, the Burial in Woollen Acts came into force in England under Charles II in an attempt to rescue the declining woollen industry and restrict the import of linen. The 1667 Act decreed that all corpses had to be buried in shrouds made of wool rather than linen or any other material. The Act was largely ignored and had to be strengthened by a second Act in 1678 which stated inter alia that: No corps (sic) should be buried in anything other than what is made of sheep's wool only; or put into any coffin lined or faced with any material but sheep's wool, on pain of forfeiture of £5, half of which sum went to the relief of the poor of the parish. Plague victims' burials were excluded. The Act instructed the curate of every parish to keep a register of all burials, together with an affidavit taken by a justice of the peace "or such like officer" swearing that the corpse was buried in wool. Some of these affidavits were elaborately decorated with illustrations of skulls, skeletons, coffins and wool-shrouded corpses. Although highly unpopular, the Act remained in the statute books until 1815.

Whilst Burial in Wool is not being enforced upon us in this way today, it will certainly be an option, with the English firm's patented line soon being made available in Australia.

JAMES PETER QUINN...CONTINUED

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more tolerant artistic views found no support among the more conservative old guard, and despite the affection held for him by many artists and students, Quinn was somewhat isolated. He did however continue to exhibit and won the Crouch Prize, Ballarat Fine Arts Galley in 1941. In the mid-1940s he taught briefly at the National Gallery School.

A lover of good food, wine and conversation, Quinn delighted in mixing with all classes and frequented the haunts of journalists, writers and the more Bohemian fringe. He was easily recognisable with his bow tie, grey curly hair and cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth. Survived by one son, he died of cancer on 18 February 1951 at Prahran.

For those who would like a day trip out of Melbourne, one of Quinn’s most memorable and enchanting portraits, that of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother is frequently on display at the Castlemaine Art Galley. Quinn painted this portrait in 1931 when the Queen Mother was still Duchess of York, five years away from the Abdication Crisis and her husband George’s unexpected succession to the Throne. Quinn portrayed the Duchess seated and facing directly the viewer. She is instantly recognisable not only from contemporary photographs but also from portraits by contemporary artists such as Philip de Laszlo (1869-1957) (as well as her most recent portrayal by Helen Bonham Carter in The King's Speech). This is a rare chance to see a portrait of this calibre on display in an Australian public collection.

FORTHCOMING TOURS

Military Tour
Sunday 1 May 2011 2.00pm
Tour leader: Glen Turnbull.

Coroners, Constabulary and Crime
Law Week Tour
Sunday 22 May 2011 2.00pm
Tour leader: Elizabeth Hore.

BUNHILL FIELDS CEMETERY, LONDON, UK

Some 120,000 bodies lie in Bunhill Fields, the former Dissenters’ burial ground established in the 1660s which lies off City Road, London. Among them are some of the most radical figures in history, including Daniel Defoe (Robinson Crusoe), John Bunyan (Pilgrims Progress) and the poet William Blake. On 22 February 2011 the cemetery was “afforded the highest level of recognition as a historic landscape” by English Heritage, becoming a Grade I Listed Park with separate listings for scores of its monuments.

“Paradoxically, the fact that many of those buried here would cheerfully have damned one another to hell on some minute point of theological dispute has brought them all together in this peaceful place,” said David Garrard, the English Heritage historian.

“Many of these people suffered a lifetime’s persecution for their beliefs before coming to rest here.”

(Source: www.english-heritage.org.uk/about/news/bunhill-fields-cemetery-given-grade-1-listed-status)

RESEARCH REQUESTS

The Friends receive many queries from within Australia and overseas regarding burials in the Cemetery. These include the usual family history research, such as requests for grave photos or a recording of grave inscriptions. Recently we received a request to research family graves for a proposed television series and also to provide recommendations for a local historian.

The Friends welcome queries but are unable to help with grave restoration. All queries for grave restoration should be referred to the Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust which maintains lists of accredited masons.

REQUEST FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Do you have family buried at St Kilda Cemetery? Would you like to share their story by contributing to Cemetery Conversations? Articles of 600 or 300 words with suitable photographs should be forwarded to Elizabeth Hore at info@foskc.org by the end of January, April, July and October for publication in the next issue.

Notice to members:

The Committee has decided to charge Members a small fee for attendance on future tours. Our group is small; our costs involved in administration are continually increasing. We have noted that other Friends’ groups charge members a reduced fee for tours, plus the results of our recent survey conducted on tours and through membership renewals for 2010-11 showed support from members for this small charge. PLEASE NOTE: Cost to member for tours is now $5.00 (half price).

General tour details:

All tours of St. Kilda Cemetery leave from the main entrance gates on Dandenong Road, St. Kilda East.

Tour cost: $10.00. Members $5.00 (plus $0.30 booking fee booked online) including refreshments.
Children (under 18 years) are free.

Bookings: Reservations for all tours are essential. Numbers are limited. Contact (03) 9531 6832 or 0422 379 053 to avoid disappointment. You can now book on-line at http://www.foskc.org (incl. $0.30 booking fee).

Tours usually run for about 90 minutes.

Tours are offered in all weathers, so please dress appropriately, for the conditions. There is little shelter or shade within the cemetery. Tours proceed at a leisurely pace, and keep to the safest paths, but those who may have difficulty walking on uneven ground should use their discretion.