

CEMETERY CONVERSATIONS



The Newsletter of the Friends of St Kilda Cemetery Inc. A0038728J

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What is a cemetery?

How do you define a cemetery? Is it a churchyard, a burial ground, a general cemetery, or just a plot of land? Brighton Cemetery historian Travis M. Sellers gives us some food for thought.

St. Andrew's Churchyard cemetery is probably the oldest in Melbourne, dating back to 1843, but St. Helena's in Greensborough and Scot's Church in Campbellfield may also have similar claims.

The oldest general cemetery is the Old Melbourne (now the Queen Victoria Market), but that's no longer a cemetery as such. It opened in 1837. Melbourne General which opened in May 1853 is the oldest still in use. Then you have Williamstown where the Trustees were gazetted in August 1854, long before Brighton (December 27, 1854) and St Kilda (January 16, 1855 but the first interment didn't take place until March 1858!)

I consider the best form of 'dating' a cemetery is discovering the date in which the Rules & Regulations and Scale of Fees were published in the Government Gazette. Rarely do you have burials at a cemetery before this date. However, the first burials at St Kilda go back to May 1855, although the Rules & Regulations weren't published until 26 February 1856. This would suggest that these burials were illegal, for it is hard to imagine any cemetery operating without a framework setting guidelines for the burial of interments. But then again, St Kilda did very little 'by the book'. Probably the oldest cemetery in Melbourne would happen to be a simple plot of land on Flagstaff Hill where the oldest known burials date back to 1836.



Death in Early Melbourne

AUTHOR and walks officianado, Meyer Eidelson, will conduct a tour of Melbourne's original burial grounds in September. The walk will take in Flagstaff Hill (formerly Burial Hill) and Victoria Market (formerly Old Melbourne Cemetery). We will also see our oldest building - St. James Cathedral - the foundation stone of which was laid in 1840 - just five years after the settlement of Victoria. Later Meyer will take us to Melbourne's oldest standing residence - Russells - built before the Gold Rush in 1850. This building has been owned by the same family for 100 years and a descendant, Lola Russell, will serve supper. Meyer is the author of four books including *Melbourne Dreaming*. He is about to publish a book of walks for the anniversary of Federation Year. He is also an urban historian, naturalist and C.A.E. tutor.

■ The *'Death in Early Melbourne'* walk will commence from St. James Cathedral, corner of Batman and King Streets at 7pm on Sunday, September 17. Participants are advised to dress for the weather. Numbers limited, bookings essential - (03) 9531 6832.

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Tour Program

■ Sunday 17 September at 7pm

'Death in Early Melbourne'

This tour, conducted by renowned walks officianado Meyer Eidelson, will explore Melbourne's first burial grounds. \$15 per head includes supper. Participants will meet at St James Cathedral, cnr Batman and King streets, City at 7pm. Numbers limited, bookings essential. (03) 9531 6832.

■ Sunday 1 October at 2pm

'Artists and Photographers'

This tour will focus on the creative people buried at St. Kilda. Melissa Hayes, Heritage Development Officer from the City of Port Phillip will lead this tour. Meet at the main gates, Dandenong Road. Details: (03) 9531 6832.

■ Sunday 5 November at 2pm

'Prahran Personalities'

This tour will focus on the notable and interesting people who lived in Prahran earlier last Century and are buried in St. Kilda Cemetery. Begins from the main gates at 2pm. Enquires: (03) 9531 6832.

'Cemetery Conversations'

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Friends of St Kilda

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Burials in the Apple Isle



'FRIENDS' Secretary Geoff Austin holidayed in Tasmania recently, but couldn't refrain from a little cemetery research.

'I've just come back from a few days in Tasmania where I checked out Hobart's Cornelian Bay Cemetery (the main public one). It's quite interesting, dating from the early 1870s. There are more than 90,000 burials and lots of sandstone monuments, but very little marble.

All the graves face East (presumably towards the rising sun and the resurrection!). Stylistically, the monuments are a little out-moded (i.e. they were still erecting early Victorian style monuments right up until the 1920s). Some of the sandstone monuments are painted white, a technique which I have also seen in NSW. I think this may have been an attempt to simulate marble.

There are relatively few grand monuments present in this cemetery, but it is a nice place to visit with Mount Wellington and the Derwent River as a backdrop. There is also a small but interesting Jewish section and a lovely simple timber "receiving house" with Egyptian detailing. This section is surrounded by a tall, clipped cypress hedge. The cemetery also has an active 'Friends' group.

- Geoff Austin

Who are the Friends?

The 'Friends of St Kilda Cemetery' is an organisation that seeks to promote the conservation and appreciation of the St. Kilda Cemetery as a place of remembrance, of historic importance and of natural beauty.

For details of tours, membership and other activities please contact:

**Geoff Austin (secretary), 4 Boondara Grove,
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Elizabeth Parsons - pioneer artist

WHEN ARTIST ELIZABETH PARSONS set her easel to paint the St Kilda foreshore, she might not have imagined how highly prized her art work would be 130 years on. The work was 'rediscovered' last year and purchased by the City of Port Phillip to hang in the St Kilda Town Hall. Elizabeth, who is buried in St Kilda Cemetery, was a fine painter who went on to become the first woman artist of note in Victoria.

Born in 1831, the daughter of George and Elizabeth Warren of Islesworth, England; she very probably inherited her artistic talent from forebears who were surveyors and teachers of drawing. She later studied art in England and Paris, joined the renowned Barbizon artists colony; before going on to become a successful teacher and professional painter. In the early 1870s Elizabeth and her architect husband George Parsons migrated to Australia with baby Adeline, arriving in Melbourne on the "Great Britain". Despite the rigours of settling into a new country with a young child; it was only six months before Elizabeth's paintings stood beside Buvelot and Von Guerard in an exhibition. She continued to paint and draw the undulating fields of what is now East St. Kilda, Malvern, Caulfield and the foreshore - with the Old Red Bluff and Brighton Beach forming the bulk of her studies. One of the first exponents of the one-man show in Melbourne, Elizabeth exhibited from 1870 to the late 1890s: In 1886 she sent paintings to the *Colonial and Indian Exhibition* in London, where her offering 'The Red Bluff' was well received by critics of the day. She was a member of the Buonarrotti Club with Longstaff, McCubbin, Roberts, and in 1875 was elected, against much opposition from the male contingent, as a member of the Council of the Victorian Academy of the Arts (later the Victorian Artists Society): It was through the Academy and her teaching that she exercised great influence on the standard of painting in the young community.

References: *History of St Kilda*, J. Cooper, *Encyclopaedia of Australian Art*, McCulloch, *National Women's Art Book* Joan Kerr (editor).

■ *The grave of Elizabeth Parsons will be just one of those visited when Port Phillip Heritage Coordinator Melissa Hayes conducts a tour of the artists and photographers buried in St Kilda Cemetery on Sunday, October 1 at 2pm. Details/bookings: 9531 6832.*



ST KILDA CEMETERY IS OPEN!

*A cremation memorial in the historic landscape at St Kilda Cemetery is a lasting remembrance of a loved life.
Choose a memorial rose position or wall niche and you create a lasting focus for remembrance forever...
Create a memorial for a loved one and you will provide peace of mind for you and your family...
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The Brighton connection

St. Andrews Historic Graveyard Restoration

Conservation Architect Helen Lardner was appointed late last year to set up a conservation management plan for St. Andrew's graveyard. The focus of the restoration program is on preservation of the monuments. There are only 44 headstones remaining in a graveyard where more than 300 burials took place - most before 1860.

St. Andrew's is a rare example in Victoria of a traditional English parish church with a private graveyard. It is of great significance not least because of its potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Australia's cultural history.

The first entries in the Burial Register tells a sad story of loss and grief. All the burials were conducted by the Reverend A C Thornton. The first dated November 4, 1845 was for Henry Head, 22 months old, son of William Head (Farmer). The next was for James Harbrow, 4½, son of William Harbrow labourer. The next two entries are for Ann Cameron, 33 and her son John Cameron 6 months. It is thought this poor woman drowned herself, leaving her labourer husband David, to mourn his loss. However the widower had two other marriages and ended life a prosperous man. Two other children, Charlotte Newman died at the age of 6½ months and James Porter at 1½. This brief extract gives some idea of the hazards of living and dying in the raw, young settlement of Brighton on the shores of Port Phillip.

- an edited extract from the June Newsletter of the Brighton Historical Society

The Friends of St Kilda Cemetery

conduct regular tours, mostly leaving from the Cemetery's main gates in Dandenong Road on Sundays at 2pm

The aim of the tours is educational and to convey to people the wealth of history pertaining to those who once lived in St. Kilda and its environs.

*For more information please contact:
Miss Pearl Donald on 9531 6832*

ODD SPOT

Reflections of a grave digger

This little story rolled out in a St Kilda nursing home one day. A tired nurse sat down beside an elderly resident. 'Would you like a cup of tea Henry?' 'Got anything to eat,' came the reply. The two sat quietly in the day room in the late afternoon - a rare moment of respite from the hustle and bustle.

'Tell me about your life Henry. What did you do for work as a young man?'

'I was a grave digger with Footscray Cemetery,' came the surprising reply. Taken aback the nurse politely enquired a little more. 'What did you do there?' 'I did everything,' came the reply. 'I dug graves, lowered coffins into the ground, cleaned up, kept the place nice. Pay was poor though. My dad was buried there in 1943. And my mother was buried in the same plot when she died on Christmas day in 1955.

'I was in Pentridge at the time but was allowed to go to the funeral.' 'Why were you in gaol?' 'For pissing in someone's front garden,' he chuckled. 'I went back to work at the Cemetery after I served my time and sometimes pinched flowers from other graves to place on my mum and dad's plot.

- AS TOLD TO THE EDITOR.



..and on a sad note

A couple of amateur cemetery historians were travelling along the Western Highway through Bacchus Marsh when they noticed a huge cross high on a hill to their right. At the foot of this hill are about 20 Irish Catholic headstones in a sadly uncared for burial ground overgrown with nettles and almost hidden by dark and brooding Cypress trees. The earliest grave is dated 1854. We pondered on the history of this sacred ground and the people buried therein. Was this a community of farmers, escapees from the potato famines in Ireland. Can anyone enlighten us?

- Susan Hudson, Editor