



# Newsletter of the Friends of St Kilda Cemetery Inc.

## Issue 9: November 2021

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Residents and Friends  
of St Kilda Cemetery

## Tours

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## President's Word

Hello valued members of FOSKC.

This will be the last newsletter for the year 2021 and we trust you will find the articles of interest.

The new Committee shown at left was elected at the 16 October Annual General Meeting. A report of the meeting appears on page 6. There are still Committee positions available which we would like filled. If you know of anyone who may be interested in volunteering, please contact us.

Sometime in the middle of January 2022, COVID-19 rules permitting, we, together with the German Consulate and the German Club, will proceed with the Baron von Mueller event. All 2021/2022 members will be invited to this special event.

The FOSKC Committee has appreciated the great support the following advertisers have provided in our 2021 newsletters:

- Edwin Fox Furniture Design mobile 0451 194 396
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- SWEP Analytical Laboratories 9701 6007
- Prahran Central Pharmacy 9827 7942 and
- Scotsburn Nurseries.

The Committee wishes our members, supporters, and their families Seasons Greetings and a Happy and COVID-safe New Year in 2022.

### President

**Gabriel Hermes**

Printed copies of our newsletters are provided courtesy of **SCOTSBURN NURSERIES**  
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Friends of St Kilda Cemetery thank Scotsburn for their kind assistance.

The Friends exist to promote the conservation and appreciation of St Kilda Cemetery by:

- Running regular tours of the cemetery.
- Publishing regular newsletters and other materials.
- Speaking to schools, community groups and kindred organisations.

- Providing information to researchers and the general public about people buried within the cemetery.

The Friends are pleased to share the information that we hold and welcome information that you may hold on people buried within the cemetery.

# Who was John Butler Cooper?

by Julianne Spring

*What haunts are not the dead,  
but the gaps left within us by the  
secrets of others.*

Searching amongst the gravestones in a particularly unkempt part of the St Kilda cemetery, one autumn day in 2015, begins this story. I was looking for the gravestone of Mary, my great grandfather's mother.

Why that mattered relates to the secrecy and mystery surrounding the circumstances of Mary's son, my great grandfather, John Butler Cooper's birth and early life.

My cousin had assured me her grave was there. She had been doing some family research and had come across a series of official records that, much to our surprise, recorded our great great grandmother, Mary Butler, as buried next to her husband, a gentleman by the name of John James from Walsall, Staffordshire.

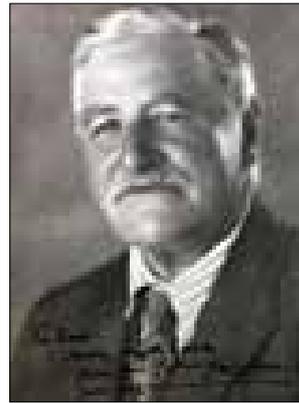


I found their grave (at left) not far from the northern wall's entrance gate and noted the date of her passing and the fact that she was recorded as John James' wife, Mary James. Here they lay, a wife and a husband united in death. There was nothing remarkable about their grave-

stone except for one gnawing fact, amongst her grandchildren and great grandchildren, she was only ever referred to as Mary Butler (MB) . . . and so, began a determined search to uncover the truth behind the secrecy of her marriage in 1894 to this John James, and what, if anything, it revealed about the illegitimate birth of my great grandfather John Butler Cooper (JBC).

Mary was the grandmother of my grandmother Joan Mary. Joan's father was my great grandfather, John Butler Cooper, who will be known to anyone interested in St Kilda's local history, as the author of the two-volume 1930s tome, *The History of St Kilda - a municipal history*.

Thank you to the contributors to this Newsletter and to Genevieve for her proofreading.



John Butler Cooper was a journalist, newspaper editor, historian, and author. He wrote for newspapers such as *The Argus* and the *Truth* and published a couple of novels. He also worked as the editor of the *Prahran Telegraph* and had his short story, "A Rogue in

Amber" published in *The Bulletin* in installments. This serialised story was said to have enjoyed great success. At home he was an amateur painter and sculptor, collecting flotsam and jetsam deposited along the banks of the Elwood Canal. In doing this he was described as a sight to behold walking along the canal with Garry his Airedale terrier hitched up to a trolley for his found treasures.

I never met my great grandfather. He was dead long before I was born but I always felt his presence keenly whenever I visited my grandmother's house. From his image displayed in photographs, to his paintings in oils and water colours, to his histories of the municipalities of St Kilda, Prahran, and Malvern on bookshelves, JBC was a character within the family, that was familiar and had always been in my consciousness.

My grandmother Joan was JBC's youngest daughter. She was the last of the seven Cooper children, and one of the five who survived into adulthood.

Gran loved to regale the family with stories about her father. Sometimes they were sweet vignettes from a different time, while others suggested a poorly understood aloof and complex man. Gran would speak of his achievements, interests, and passions, but the most poignant part of her stories about her father was always the deep shame he felt about his illegitimacy.

There were many aspects of the story that were disconnected or did not make sense. Lost in time or as Gran got older, something she just didn't want to explore in any depth. Gleaned from Joan's accounts the further details of JBC's origins and his life were these:

- He was conceived in England but born in Australia.

- He was the illegitimate son of Irish servant, Mary Butler.
- His father was the son of an English solicitor.
- The father's family was quite wealthy and provided Mary with a passage to Australia.
- He attended Melbourne Grammar.
- He married Susan Tivendale and had 7 children.
- He was artistic and literary but an eccentric and remote father.

The scant details of JBC's life have always nagged at me. But my research, and that of other family members, has made it possible to construct the following version of his early life.

From my own research I know that JBC was born in Melbourne some time in 1863 and died in 1951.

In the Melbourne Grammar School archives, it is recorded that he attended the school from 1875 to 1878.

We know that the school's fees would have been out of the reach of someone of Mary's social standing and can only assume that the English family, who paid Mary's passage from England, were continuing to foot the bill. In the school's archive there is mention of the young JBC having a guardian, a man by the name of John James.

In the 1870s *Sands and McDougall Directory*, a gentleman by the name of John James is listed as residing at *Rushall* Boundary Road, Armadale (to become 55 Kooyong Road). This is the same person whom Mary married in 1894, but at no point does he or Mary formally acknowledge that he is the father of Mary's child.

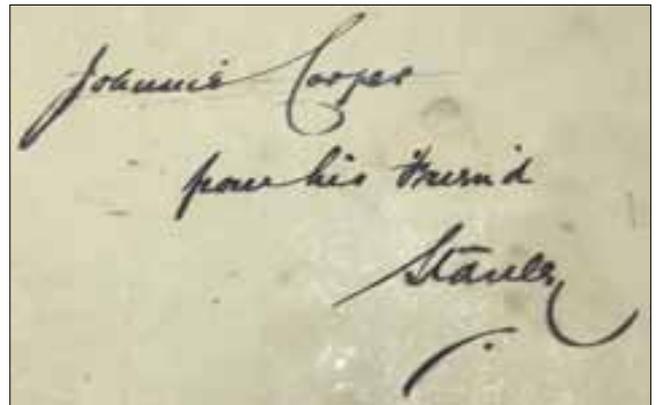
In John James' will, Mary inherits *Rushall* with no child mentioned, whilst Mary's death certificate states she has no issue and yet her will names JBC as her son and executor.

On JBC's death certificate his father is cited as a John Cooper, but Gran was always adamant that no such person had ever existed, and that the surname "Cooper" was a made-up name. This was verified when we found Mary's 1894 marriage certificate to John James, which listed her name as Mary Butler. These snippets of information confirm how much was hidden to maintain the social illusion of respectability for both Mary and her son. I can only imagine the emotional pain caused by illegitimacy to JBC and Mary over

their lifetimes.

My knowledge of JBC as a character of interest was piqued by the mystery surrounding his parentage and the old books on the shelves of my grandparent's library. These were his commissioned local histories; his novels and a set of books he had owned entitled *The Vagabond Papers*. These items were distributed between different family members after my grandmother's passing. I was given the two-volume *History of St Kilda* and a neatly bundled up package of four original copies of *The Vagabond Papers* labelled "for Julie".

I had some interest in Australian history and knew that *The Vagabond Papers* were probably valuable. As I looked at my newly inherited copies, I noted on the fly leaf of two of the books personalised inscriptions; one to "Johnnie Cooper from his friend Stanley" and the other to a "John James with The Vagabond's sincere regards". This one is dated July 1877.



It took me a long time to realise that both inscriptions were critical clues to the puzzle of "Who is John Butler Cooper?"

For those of you who don't know, the investigative journalist, The Vagabond achieved some celebrity in Melbourne of the 1870s as he went undercover to expose the city's most venerable institutions to public scrutiny. His stories on the Benevolent Asylum and the Melbourne General Cemetery are just two examples of his journalism which resulted in public inquiries. He was published in *The Argus* and was widely read, his exposes eagerly awaited and discussed by Melbournian's of the day. In 2011, the Melbourne Press Club named him a foundation member of its Media Hall of Fame.

When his cover as The Vagabond was eventually revealed some time in the 1870s, he used the alias, Julian Thomas. He used this name up until his death in 1896; however,

his actual identity, John Stanley James (JSJ), was disclosed by my grandfather in a 1912 article he wrote, published in *Life* called "Who was The Vagabond?"

In the article, it was clear that the two men shared a very close relationship as my great grandfather recounted intimate details about JSJ such as his attempted suicides, his sojourn in the United States and circumstances leading up to his death.

The two men also shared an interest in journalism and, with an age difference of some twenty years, it is reasonable to think and quite feasible that JSJ mentored the much younger JBC as he made his way in journalism; perhaps facilitating his cadetship with *The Argus* through a formal introduction.

Their closeness was also most likely to have been facilitated by the fact that John Stanley James was the nephew of JBC's guardian, John James. Having arrived in Melbourne penniless and destitute, and licking his wounds from a disastrous marriage and set of ruinous investments in the United States, there is no doubt that JSJ would have made contact with his Melbourne-based uncle.

If this is so, I think it is probable that JBC and The Vagabond met not long after JSJ's arrival in Australia in 1875 when JBC was around 12 years of age.

It is not beyond the realms of possibility to imagine that Mary and her son may have lived in the same house as John James, with Mary acting as his housekeeper and carer whilst he assumed the financial responsibility of caring for her and her child as part of an agreement made between Mary and the James' family back in England.

Mary was known to have been in service in Walsall, Staffordshire, England in the 1860s, so a line between the James family, Mary and her son can be easily drawn. We also have him cited as JBC's guardian at Melbourne Grammar, and know he is the man Mary eventually married. So, it is feasible that their association with him and his relationship as uncle to The Vagabond meant that the four of them were all brought into each other's orbit.

In 1877 at the peak of The Vagabond's popularity, he has signed the personalised copy I have in my possession, so, it is not too much of a stretch to imagine that he made contact with his uncle and the young JBC even prior to this date.

By all accounts, The Vagabond was a colourful character, full of bluster, ego, and contradictions. Bursting into the 12-year-old JBC's life, full of stories of the American Civil War and bristling with energy from his newfound celebrity as the intrepid but unknown writer of The Vagabond articles in *The Argus*, I am certain this had significance for JBC. But how much of the past was revealed and how much remained hidden?

And as for Mary, it may have been that she and JSJ were reacquainted in Melbourne.

The oral narrative of my grandmother's recount relating to JBC's father is exactly mirrored in the known facts relating to John Stanley James. It is JSJ's father who was a solicitor, and it was JSJ who fell out with his father over "a lady" sometime in the early 1860s. JSJ's father was Joseph Green James a Wolverhampton solicitor and brother to John James, Mary's eventual husband.

The details of JSJ's estrangement from his father accords with my grandmother's story of JBC's father and of course provide the strongest suggestion that John Stanley James may have been the actual father of my great grandfather.

I also wonder, with the level of respectability her marriage to John James afforded her, why Mary was only ever referred to as Mary Butler, even by Gran's much older siblings who would have all known her, and been aware of her married name? Was her marriage to the older James relative simply overshadowed by the more significant one of that of her child's father? We cannot be certain, but the association was certainly a close one.

The Vagabond's second name, Stanley, would have been used in the household where there were two John James, and this of course explains the second inscription in my copy of *The Vagabond Papers*. Addressed to a young JBC, "Johnnie", it strikes me that there is a sweetness and affection in the note as JSJ writes "from your friend Stanley".

Another fragment that may suggest a close connection between The Vagabond and Mary Butler, are the initials MB in a memorial notice for JSJ when he passed away. Published in *The Argus*, it stated "in sad remembrance of my dear friend Julian Thomas ('The Vag') who departed this life September 4, 1896. MB". No published memorial notice from his uncle John James nor John Butler Cooper has ever been found.

Other factors that contribute to the view that JSJ fathered JBC are that:

- MB was in service in Walsall in the early 1860s.
- John James the uncle to The Vagabond, was known to be in Australia at the time of JBC's conception.
- JSJ and MB are much closer in age than MB and John James.
- John James left JBC nothing in his will – not even a watch.
- On the other hand, in the 1890s a sum of £25 was given by the Vagabond to JBC. It effectively became a gift when he died in 1896.

What is obvious and in plain sight has often led to the most valuable finds within my unravelling of JBC's story. The books were my beginning, but when I found a photograph of a man and a woman in late Victorian dress behind a small 4 centimetre x 5 centimetre framed photograph (below) of John Butler Cooper, I knew that I was looking at Mary Butler, because there pinned to her chest was the same gold fob watch my grandmother Joan had given me, easily recognisable because it has the same open face as the watch that I have in my possession. I had looked at the image of JBC that had sat on Gran's dressing table for years and never known what it was so carefully hiding.



The hidden photograph possibly showing JJ and MB

The author supplied the photographs.

The Vagabond's work was treasured by JBC, and in my family's past there really is no one else's presence as strong.

Mary Butler had always been such an elusive part of the family's story. But, on that beautiful autumn day in 2015, her gravestone in the St Kilda Cemetery provided a direct link to the James' family, that allowed me to begin unfurling her long-buried secrets and set me on a path to filling in some of the gaps left by the secrets of others.

P.S. When Gran gave me the watch in the 1990s, she told me it was French and nothing more. It was a pretty watch, but it had sat in my jewellery box untouched for almost 30 years. Of course, when I realised the watch on the woman's bodice in the photo was the same one, I immediately set to inspecting its provenance. The watch is made of 18 carat rose gold with etchings on the back. The face is white with black roman numerals. There is no personalised inscription, but the jeweller's name is clear, it is a Charles Loupais of Noumea, New Caledonia.

Whilst nothing can be absolutely proven, I wonder if the watch was purchased by JSJ on one of his trips to New Caledonia. Loupais worked as a jeweller in Noumea in the late nineteenth century. This was during the time The Vagabond would have visited the French colony whilst investigating the blackbirding trade to Australia.



John Butler Cooper in 1921

# Annual General Meeting

The Friends of St Kilda Cemetery Inc (FOSKC) held its 22nd Annual General Meeting by Zoom on Saturday 16 October 2021 commencing at 2.00pm.

FOSKC Sam Hibbins MP in the Chair started by Acknowledging the Country on which the meeting was held. Twelve attended with five apologies and four proxies received.

The minutes of the 21st Annual Meeting on 14 December 2020 were adopted as a true and accurate record.

## President's Report

Gabriel Hermes next provided the following President's Report.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we are conducting a Zoom meeting.

This year 2021 has been a very difficult year all around with all tours being cancelled because of COVID. At the same time, we developed with the Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust a Waiver Form for persons attending a tour and the Trust will inspect the route of each tour before it is conducted. We thank Rob Heath as Vice President for his efforts in developing these procedures.

Our membership has suffered a little bit with some members not renewing or passing away, but we have held our costs down by having some businesses pay for advertising in our Newsletters. This will continue in the future.

Four Newsletters have been published in January, April, July and September with a final issue coming in November. I encourage all members to contribute to the newsletters.

Our well-planned Baron von Mueller event, planned for October in conjunction with the German Consul and the German Club, has been postponed to mid-January 2022.

The Committee has discussed the idea of introducing a Friends of St Kilda Cemetery Inc Life Membership and a Volunteer Award. These will be discussed further and a proposal for members' consideration will be made at next year's Annual General Meeting.

So, we hope 2022 will be a better year.

The meeting received the President's Report.

## Treasurer's Report

FOSKC Treasurer, Robin Douglas, reported that the association has Total Assets of \$12,732.91 and Total Liabilities of \$90. For the year 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021, Total Revenue was \$683.35 while Total Expenses amounting to \$634.84 making a Net Income of \$48.51.

The Treasurer's Report was approved and accepted.

## Office Bearers and Committee Members

The following were elected:

President Gabriel Hermes; Vice President Claire Barton; Secretary Robin Douglas; Treasurer Robin Douglas; Committee member Geoffrey Paterson.

Stephen Haby and the Prahran Mechanics Institute were thanked for facilitating the Zoom session.

The meeting was followed by the speaker, Julianne Spring, who spoke on her great great grandfather, journalist and local historian John Butler Cooper.

# The Missing Body

This article appeared in *The Argus* of Wednesday 14 December 1921, page 23.

"A number of mourners who had assembled at Spencer street station on Monday to await the arrival of a body which had been despatched from Warrnambool for interment in the St Kilda cemetery that afternoon, were very indignant when the train arrived without the body. It was definitely ascertained that the body had left Warrnambool, and inquiries were at once set on foot to trace its whereabouts. It was

located at Geelong, where the van containing it had been shunted off the midday passenger train from the Western district on its arrival at Geelong. Instructions were issued to convey the body to the metropolis as soon as possible, and this was done by a special engine, the body being handed over to the mourners two hours late. It is understood that a special inquiry will be made to ascertain who was responsible for the painful blunder."

# Louis Cooper 1851–1931

by Annette Cooper



Just to the east of Alfred Deakin's gravesite in the Baptist area of St Kilda Cemetery lies the grave of my great grandfather, Louis Cooper. His first wife, Elizabeth, and second wife, Julia, are also

buried there, though only a plaque for Elizabeth is present.

The inscription states that Louis was born in Heyford in 1851. This pretty English town on the Oxford Canal would resonate with Louis throughout his life, long after he'd left England for Australia.

My great grandfather was born in Lower Heyford on 13 September 1851. He was one of nine children from Thomas Cooper's marriage to Mary Grantham.

He married Elizabeth Amelia Roberts at Oldbury, West Midlands, in 1875, when he was 24.<sup>1</sup> They had three children: William Thomas Roberts (1876), Frederick Louis (1878) and Amelia (1885).

By 1881, Louis and his family were living in Bristol. He was working as a clerk with a glass merchant.<sup>2</sup>

For reasons that I have not been able to ascertain, the family set sail from England on the ship *Sorata* on 8 December 1885 bound for Australia. Possibly it was to improve Louis' business prospects and/or to improve the health of their son Frederick. To me, it seems a very brave undertaking, particularly as Amelia was just an infant.<sup>3</sup> They arrived in Melbourne on 24 January 1886.

There is a detailed account of the journey in *The Argus* in 1886 describing the ship's ports of call, celebration of Christmas (the quarter-deck was transformed into a "gaily decked ballroom") and the weather conditions. The *Sorata* berthed at the railway pier, Williamstown, and "passengers were conveyed to town by special train."<sup>4</sup>

At the time Louis left England, Queen Victoria was still on the throne, the sun hadn't yet set on the British Empire, and author, D. H. Lawrence, had just been born. He arrived in Melbourne on the other side of the world and saw a city that was booming. "Marvelous Melbourne" was all in all the place to be.

Only two years after arriving in Australia, however, Louis' wife, Elizabeth, died in February 1888. She was only 36.

Louis married Julia Spurr a year later, in 1889.<sup>5</sup> They had two children: Florence in 1891 and Blanche in 1894. Florence would go onto become a surgeon at the Queen Victoria Hospital.

In 1907–1908, Louis built a grand house at 22 Chaucer Crescent, Canterbury, on a large block of land. In memory of his birthplace, he called the house *Heyford*. Built in the Arts and Crafts style, the house was significant enough to be featured in *Table Talk* at the time. The architect, Herbert Black, would later design the Lady Clarke Memorial in the Queen Victoria Gardens.



*Heyford*, 22 Chaucer Crescent, Canterbury (then referred to as East Camberwell), *Table Talk*, 17 December 1908, p. 17.

In regard to Louis' professional life, some time after arriving in Melbourne, he started working for Brooks, Robinson & Company Limited – a store in the city at 59–65 Elizabeth Street. He would go on to become Managing Director for many years.



Brooks, Robinson building  
(perfins.com.au)

An entry in eMelbourne describes the firm in this way:

"Brooks, Robinson began in 1854 as import merchants, dealing in window and table glass and interior-decorating supplies. They later moved into commercial glazing, particularly shopfronts, but did not

produce stained glass windows until the 1880s. Their big opportunity came in the 1890s when they were engaged to install St Paul's Cathedral's great cycle of stained-glass windows in Melbourne, made by Clayton & Bell in London".<sup>6</sup>

These dates suggest that the St Paul's commission occurred around the time Louis was working there. Louis was also a friend of Clements Langford, who built the towers and spire at St Paul's. According to my aunt, this friendship came about through Louis' work at Brooks, Robinson.<sup>7</sup>

Brooks, Robinson would go on to play a role in the professional lives of three generations of Coopers – from Louis to his son William, to his grandsons Louis and Gordon – all of whom worked there.

Louis retired as Managing Director from Brooks, Robinson in 1923–1924 and became Director.

In 1925, he sold *Heyford*. According to my aunt, he then moved into a flat. He hated living in a flat, however, so he bought another house, which he also called *Heyford*, on the corner of Burke Road and Mowbray Street, Camberwell. To distinguish between the two properties, the new home was referred to as *New Heyford* and the former as *Old Heyford*.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, I think *New Heyford* has recently been demolished.

In 1931, Louis became seriously ill. Shortly after, he died on 30 July 1931, aged 79. Notices in the press outlined his successful business career and Freemason membership.<sup>9</sup> He was buried in St Kilda Cemetery, along with his first wife, Elizabeth, and second wife, Julia, who died in 1936.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> <http://www.westmidlandsbmd.org.uk/marriagesearch.php>
- <sup>2</sup> Census for 47 St Nicholas Rd, Bristol, England, 1881, Ancestry Library.

- <sup>3</sup> Cabin Passengers, Victoria, Australia, Assisted and Unassisted Passenger Lists, 1839–1923, Ancestry Library.
- <sup>4</sup> 'Shipping Intelligence', *The Argus*, 25 January 1886, p.4.
- <sup>5</sup> Births Deaths and Marriages Victoria.
- <sup>6</sup> 'Stained Glass', eMelbourne.
- <sup>7</sup> Author's conversation with Evelyn Cooper, 1 January 1992.
- <sup>8</sup> Author's conversation with Evelyn Cooper, 1 January 1992.
- <sup>9</sup> For example, *The Herald*, 31 July 1931, p.5.



Louis Cooper's grave at Baptist B, 0264, St Kilda Cemetery, 30 March 2020.

Photos of Louis Cooper and his grave are from the author's collection.

*Louis Cooper is not related to John Butler Cooper. Editor.*

FOSKC membership at \$15 includes tours and newsletters. For details, email [info@foskc.org](mailto:info@foskc.org)

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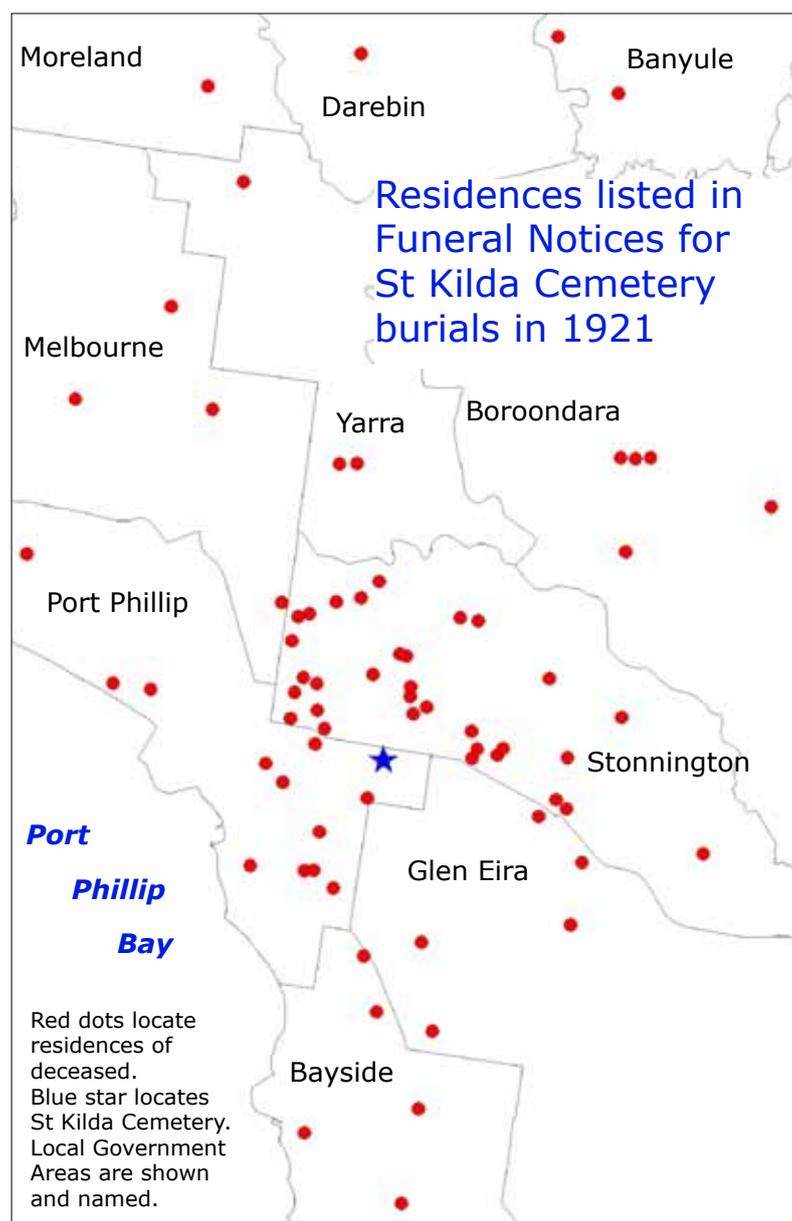
[pahrancentralpharmacy.com](http://pahrancentralpharmacy.com)

# The Cemetery 100 years ago

In this last instalment for the cemetery in 1921, I turned to the Funeral Notices in the Melbourne dailies. Using Trove, I identified 88 notices using the phrase <St Kilda Cemetery> for the 1921 calendar year. I looked forward to identifying the distribution of the deceased, churches involved, funeral directors used, and the cemetery sections in which they were buried.

## Distribution pattern

Most notices contained the residential address of the deceased, or a relative of the deceased. In order to map these using geographic information systems, I determined each residence's latitude and longitude. This information allowed me to produce the map below where each dot locates the place from which the funeral departed. Places not mapped are Longford and Hepburn in Victoria and Sydney.



## Churches

To my surprise, only three funeral notices named a church – in each case St Mary's Catholic Church in Dandenong Road, East St Kilda.

## Funeral directors

Forty-six notices contained this information which is shown in the table below.

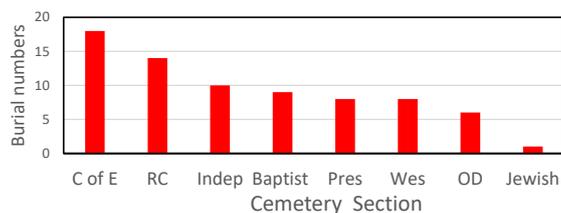
## Cemetery sections

I identified this information by matching names with entries in the Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust's Deceased Search. This information is graphed below.

Most of the deceased were buried with persons who predeceased them. Notices also noted additional information including lodge memberships, and occupations such as cable tram gripman and railway inspector.

**Geoffrey Paterson**

## St Kilda Cemetery 1921 Burial numbers by Section as listed in Funeral Notices



## St Kilda Cemetery burials in 1921 by Funeral Director

Funeral Director	Burial nos
John Allison	1
W. G. Apps	10
E Burton & Sons	1
Chas P. Frilay	1
Herbert King	4
Le Pine	1
Henry Lewis	1
R. McKenzie	2
B Matthews	5
A. W. Padbury	1
Preus & Sons	1
Raybould's	4
A. A. Sleight	10
F. Taylor	2

Source: Funeral Notices in Melbourne daily papers