



# Cemetery Conversations

The Newsletter of the Friends of St Kilda Cemetery Inc.

Issue 16

November 2004

## EUREKA!

Following the discovery of gold in 1851, the administration of the Victorian gold fields was left to the officers of the Gold Commission. According to Geoffrey Serle in *The Golden Age* (1963), salaries were generous and living conditions comfortable. Serle quotes one Gold Commissioner who remarked:

*"Those were snug times! We had handsome salaries, all our expenses paid, as many servants as we pleased, all paid for; and nothing to do, but order whatever we choose, and send in the accounts. We never sat down to dinner without Champagne and Burgundy in those days".*

A number of officers of the Gold Commission are buried at St. Kilda Cemetery. They include William Henry Wright (the Chief Commissioner of the Victorian Gold Fields), Francis Doveton (the first Gold Commissioner at Ballarat) and Robert Rede (the "little doctor" who was determined to crush the rebel miners at Eureka).

Resentment of the lifestyle led by the Gold Commissioners and their maladministration of the goldfields were among the factors that led to the Eureka rebellion on Sunday 3 December 1854. One hundred and fifty years after the rebellion, you are invited to join the Friends on a tour of the St. Kilda Cemetery. The tour will feature the graves of a number of the abovementioned Gold Commissioners. A visit will also be made to the grave of Arthur Akehurst who was Clerk of Petty Sessions at Ballarat. In 1854, Akehurst served with other officers of the Government Camp against the rioters at the Stockade. He was charged over the death of the miner Henry Powell in the battle at the Stockade. Powell, who had initially survived the attack, identified Akehurst as his attacker and in his dying statement told Police Inspector Evans of how he had been struck by Akehurst's sword.

*"My name is Henry Powell, I am a digger residing at Creswick-creek. I fell Creswick-creek about noon on*

*Saturday, December 2nd. I said to my mates, 'You'll get the slabs ready. I will just go over to see Cox and his family at Ballarat'. I arrived at Ballarat about half-past four, or thereabouts. I saw armed men walking about in parties of twenty or thirty; went to Cox's tent; put on another pair of trousers, and walked down the diggings. Looked in the ring (the stockade). After that, went home, went to bed in the tent at the back of Cox's tent, about half-past nine. On Sunday morning about four or half-past, was awoke by the noise of firing. Got up soon after, and walked about twenty yards, when some trooper rode up to me. The foremost one was a young man whom I knew as the Clerk of the Peace [Akehurst]. He was of a light, fair complexion, with reddish hair. He told me to 'stand in the Queen's name! You are my prisoner'. I said 'Very good, Sir'. Up came more troopers. I cannot say how many. Believe about twenty or thirty. I said, 'Very well, gentlemen (!) don't be in a hurry, there are plenty of you', and then the young man struck me on the head with a crooked knife, about three feet and a half long, in a sheath. I fell to the ground. They then fired at me, and rode over me several times. I never had any hand in the disturbance. There, that's all".*

In January 1855, Akehurst stood trial for manslaughter over the death of Henry Powell. He was the only Government official to face the court but was discharged. These events did not seem to hinder Akehurst's career. Akehurst later moved to Geelong (as did Robert Rede) as a Clerk of the Court and then moved around Victoria as a Police Magistrate. In 1890 he was appointed secretary of the Law Department. He died in 1902 after leading a "very retired life" (Source: *The Argus* 18 June 1902). 🌹

This being the final issue for 2004, we wish all Friends, a safe and happy festive season and a prosperous and healthy 2005. 🌹



## Changes to "Cemetery Conversations"

## 150th Anniversary

As reported in the August 2004 issue, Sherryn Danaher has relinquished the role of editor. We again thank Sherryn for her dedication and wish her well for the future. With Sherryn's retirement, we have taken the opportunity to re-design "Cemetery Conversations" and introduce some new features which we hope you will enjoy.

- "Cemeteries Worth Visiting" - as the name suggests, we take a look at interesting cemeteries, their historical features and why they are worth visiting.
- "Profiles of the Past" - featuring biographical sketches on the lives of some of St. Kilda Cemetery's lesser known historic interments.
- "Around the Graves" - an informal conversational column with a sense of intimacy in the style of the renowned sporting journalist W. Moxon Cook's "Turf Gossip" published under the guise as 'Terlinga' in *The Australian* newspaper from 1892 to 1917.
- "Odd Spot" - proof that there is humour in cemeteries!

We also aim to produce regular quarterly editions of "Cemetery Conversations", the next in February 2005.

The Editor welcomes contributions from readers for publication. If you have an interesting story why not share it with other readers. Contact details are on the last page. All contributions will be gratefully received.

And finally, the fresh appealing new look was not possible without the effort of Grant Cook of the design house "Afrenasia" (<http://www.afrenasia.com>). 🐾

*"Sickness me did seize  
And no physician could give me ease  
Go home dear friends and shed no tears  
I must lay here till Christ appears"*

(Charlotte Swindell, d 29 Sep 1881, interred Church of England "B" 161 St. Kilda Cemetery) 🐾

Next year marks the 150th anniversary of the opening of the St. Kilda Cemetery making it the second oldest general cemetery in Melbourne still operating. This year has seen many institutions celebrate 150 years. Here is a few:

- *Museum Victoria* - founded in March 1854 as the Museum of Natural History with two rooms in the Government Assay Office in La Trobe Street.
- *State Library of Victoria* - the foundation stone was laid on 3 July 1854 by Sir Charles Hotham (Melbourne General Cemetery). It opened to the public in February 1856.
- *Victorian Railways* - what began as a private enterprise in September 1854 with the opening of the Sandridge (Port Melbourne) railway line, paved the way for other lines to St. Kilda (1857), North Brighton (1859), Essendon (1860) and Hawthorn (1861).
- *Melbourne Cricket Ground* - the people's ground was first used in 1854 when a cricket match was played on the last day in September. Hard to believe this hallowed turf was once a police paddock.
- *The Age* newspaper - the first edition of this Melbourne institution was published on 17 October 1854 as "a journal of politics, commerce and philanthropy, dedicated to the record of great movements, the advocacy of free institutions, the diffusion of truth and the advancement of man".
- *Elsternwick Hotel* - this one time "isolated way-side inn...and a favourite for bushrangers" on the corner of Brighton and Glenhuntly roads opened for business before St. Kilda (or the nearby Brighton) Cemetery was operating. How very Australian!

Keep an eye out for our special May 2005 commemorative edition focussing on 150 marvellous years of St. Kilda Cemetery. 🐾

## "Cemetery Conversations" via E-mail

Over the coming editions, we will be endeavouring to make "Cemetery Conversations" available in colour via e-mail. This form of distribution is quicker and more efficient than posting hard copy, and makes considerable savings on our expenses. If you would like to receive future copies of "Cemetery Conversations" by e-mail, please contact us at [info@foskc.org](mailto:info@foskc.org) 🐾



## Cemeteries Worth Visiting

**What:** Bairnsdale Cemetery.

**Where:** Bairnsdale is about 281 kms or a 3 hour drive from Melbourne via the Princess Highway. The cemetery is located on Forge Creek Road, 3.4 km from the War Memorial.

**Who:** Alfred William Howitt (1830-1908), Explorer and Sir Albert Lind (1878-1964), Politician.

**Why:** Nestled in the corner of the racecourse and surrounded by farms, Bairnsdale Cemetery is a well maintained regional cemetery befitting the size of the locality. The earliest burials date from at least 1866. Though the cemetery is predominately lawn and monumental, what is striking are the changes to the denominational areas through the different eras. St Kilda Cemetery is pretty much uniform throughout with bricks paths and identical grave markers. This is not the case at Bairnsdale. In the centre monumental areas, one can see the novel use of gravel combined with in-built concrete grave markers for plots without a headstone monument. In the other monumental areas, there is evidence of wooden gravesite markers, though time has left them badly deteriorated. Mostly, metal markers are used throughout (two different designs were noted) making it unique for a country cemetery that so many of the graves are identifiable. Likewise for the denominational areas, each are well marked out with large but not overbearing signs. This suggests the cemetery is well cared for. Disappointing is the lack of prominent monuments to attract the eye of the welcome visitor. Instead, a majority of the monuments are of the post-1930 concrete style, uniform grey and



Gravel and concrete monuments



Wooden gravesite marker

bland. Of interest are the number of graves with wooden monuments, the lettering no longer readable. Many of the major pre-1900 Melbourne monumental masons are all represented at the cemetery including “A. A. Sleight”, “A. & G. Ballantyne”, “Marsh Grout & Co”, “J. Hanson” and “Corben”.

Far from Bairnsdale being solely a monumental cemetery, the Trustees have incorporated lawn interments in new areas, but also developed ‘dead’ areas into lawn sections such as along the main road in an attractive manner. Another interesting aspect of the cemetery is an area of Chinese graves, with possible evidence of a ceremonial ‘oven’. Before the expansion of additional lawn and monumental areas to the rear, this Chinese area would most likely have been at the back of the original cemetery.



War Cemetery

Located nearby is a beautifully maintained quaint War Cemetery not dissimilar in size to the one at Sale Cemetery. There are 38 graves to airmen who lost their lives while posted


in the area during WWII. With the exception of the striking palm trees in the centre and around the War Cemetery, vegetation is non-existent. However, there have been recent efforts to introduce new plantings notwithstanding the prevailing drought conditions.

Overall, Bairnsdale Cemetery reflects the expansion of the locality into a populous regional town and the Trustees have done well to adapt to the changing needs of the population while still maintaining its own unique individuality. At approximately 15 acres in size, much of it already developed, the cemetery is facing a limited future.

*Next: Gisborne Cemetery*



### Odd Spot

While attending a social engagement, a Manager/Secretary of a cemetery was asked by a member of the opposite sex what he did in life. With deft subtlety, he replied - “I fix doctors’ mistakes”. 



## Around the Graves

We all know that St. Kilda Cemetery is one of the oldest burial grounds in metropolitan Melbourne, but which site has the distinction of being *the* oldest cemetery still in existence? Burial grounds like Flagstaff Hill (1836), Old Melbourne (1837), Point Ormond (1840) and the little Gellibrand Point Cemetery at Williamstown (1842) no longer exist, so cannot be considered. How about St. Andrew's Churchyard in New Street Brighton? The first burial was said to have been on 9 November 1844. Does anyone know of an older ground that still exists today? Contact the Editor.

Passed opera great Gertrude Johnson's grave lately? A well deserved monument and bronze plaque was recently constructed on her gravesite at a cost of \$3,415 under the Federal Government's historic events and famous people grants program. We have no idea how it came about or who was behind it, but are grateful nonetheless to the generous bureaucrats in Canberra (*Source: Sunday Age 3 October 2004*).



It's official! St. Kilda Cemetery is now on the Victorian Heritage Register, making it one of three cemeteries in Melbourne accorded protection. The Committee prepared a submission in support of the cemetery's inclusion in the Heritage Register and is delighted with the outcome. (*Source: Victorian Government Gazette, No.42 14 October 2004 p2896-98*).

Who would have thought that a loyal subject of Her Majesty the Queen would be seen distributing promotional material with the Southern Cross flag, long considered a symbol of rebellion? That was the situation Geoff Austin found himself in when handing out flyers for the forthcoming Eureka tour. How times have changed.

Those of you who elected not to attend Susan Johns'



tour of Box Hill Cemetery on 5 September missed out on a superbly organised and well researched tour. The highlight of the day was entry into the Columbarium, built in 1929

to the design of Rodney Alsop (Brighton Cemetery). So what was Cyril Callister's contribution to our national history? He invented Vegemite, the lucky prize going to jovial Gus Allen. Box Hill Cemetery was a bit of latecomer, the first burial taking place in August 1873. 🐾

## Forthcoming Activities

### Eureka and Gold Tour

**Sunday 5 December 2004 at 2:00pm**

Celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Eureka uprising by a band of aggrieved Ballarat gold diggers with this tour of St. Kilda Cemetery. The tour will also visit the graves of people associated with the rush to be rich.

### Albert Jacka V.C. Commemorative Service

**Sunday 16 January 2005 at 2:00pm**

First held by members of the 14th Battalion Association in 1933, the Albert Jacka commemorative service has been held every year since his untimely death on 17 January 1932. Jacka, who along with the likes of Henry (Harry) Murray V.C. (1880-1966) and Joseph Maxwell V.C. (1896-1967), was at the forefront of a renowned band of fearless frontline soldiers who forged a reputation unparalleled in Australian Military History. Revered amongst his men, he went on to become a champion of the unemployed during his term as a Councillor (1929-32). The commemorative service has experienced renewed interest since the early 1990s through the efforts of the City of Port Phillip and the Naval and Military Club of St. Kilda. 🐾

### Office Bearers and Contacts

Friends of St Kilda Cemetery Inc (Reg no A0038728J)  
 www.vicnet.net.au/~foskc      www.foskc.org.au  
 PO Box 261 St Kilda Vic 3182      (03) 9527 2387 or (03) 9531 6832

**President**  
**Vice-President**  
**Treasurer**  
**Secretary**

Freda Erlich  
 Kay Rowan  
 John Hulskamp  
 Geoff Austin

### Committee Members

Pearl Donald  
 John Hawker  
 Travis Sellers 🐾