

# Cemetery Conversations



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

## JOHN NICOL CROMBIE (1827-1878) – PIONEERING PHOTOGRAPHER

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John Nicol Crombie is one of a number of significant photographers buried in St. Kilda General Cemetery (among the notable others are the landscape photographer Nicholas Caire).

John Nicol Crombie was born in Glasgow on 11 August 1827. According to the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography (DNZB) he emigrated to Australia during the goldrush in 1852, but unable to find work as an engineer, he took a job with the American photographic firm of Meade Brothers. In 1855, he arrived in Auckland, New Zealand, where he opened a studio.

DNZB records that:

*“This lively and entertaining man had a penchant for gaining publicity, and through numerous advertisements and reports in local papers it is possible to trace his meteoric rise as a professional photographer and a member of the business community.*

*In January 1856 Crombie offered “every man, woman and child an opportunity of procuring a portrait which for artistic finish and mathematical correctness is not to be surpassed”. Mounted in handsome cases or gilt frames they were “calculated to deck a cottage or adorn a palace”. The*

*advertising succeeded: Crombie claimed that during his first 15 months in Auckland he took over 1,000 portraits.”*

An example of his advertisements appears in the *Nelson Examiner and New Zealand Chronicle* of 4 October 1856:

*“ D A G U E R R E O T Y P E PORTRAITURE.*

*J. N. CROMBIE (late of Shortland Crescent, Auckland), PHOTOGRAPHER, by appointment, to his Excellency the Governor of New Zealand, begs to announce to the public generally that he has fitted apartments in one of Mr. Snow's cottages, Hardy-Street, for the prosecution of the above art in all its details, comprising, besides the usual styles*

- Crayons, which have a peculiar flowing and sketchy appearance.
- Stereoscopic Pictures represent the figure as possessing all the solidity and roundness of statuary.
- Plain, Landscape, or Luminated Back-grounds.
- Arrangements can be made for taking invalid or

*(Continued on page 2)*

*“Arrangements can be made for taking invalid or deceased persons at their residence”.*

**FRIENDS OF ST. KILDA CEMETERY INC.**  
(REG NO. A0038728J)  
ABN 69 718 923 799)

PO Box 261  
ST. KILDA VIC 3182  
AUSTRALIA

Phone: 9527 2387 / 9531 6832

email: info@foskc.org  
website: www.foskc.org



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deceased persons at their residence.

- Views of Town or Country Seats.
- Favourite Animals, &c.
- Oil or Water- coloured Paintings, and every other description of object, accurately copied.
- Any description of dark dress is the best adapted for the perfect development of the portrait.
- Instructions given in the art. Amateurs supplied with apparatus, chemicals, &c.

The public are respectfully invited to call and inspect specimens.”

By 1861, Crombie was submitting images for the *London Illustrated News*. He was one of the earliest photographers to record outdoor scenes. He received an Honourable Mention in the class of “photographic apparatus and photography” for his views of New Zealand at the International Exhibition of 1862 in London. DNZB records that in 1862:

“Crombie returned to Europe partly to learn about the latest developments in the photographic field. While in Scotland he gave an address to the Glasgow Photographic Association, discussing photography in

New Zealand and claiming that only a handful of photographers had been there before him.”

Crombie married Harriet Berry on 23 May 1864 at Yarpole in Herefordshire, England before returning to New Zealand.

DNZB records:

“Always with an eye to publicity, Crombie also covered events that had caught the public's imagination and the photographs now constitute a valuable photographic record of Auckland between 1855 and 1869. Subjects include...portraits of 12 Maori chiefs at the Kohimarama conference in 1860, portraits of the members of the House of Representatives in 1861, the collapse of Sibbin's building in Queen Street in 1865 and the visit of the Duke of Edinburgh in 1869.

By the mid 1860s Crombie's carte-de-visite trade was flourishing (in 1865 he received an order for 1,000 prints for the actors Mr and Mrs Case), and at 9s. a dozen it can be seen that he was fast becoming a wealthy man. He invested his earnings in real estate in Auckland, and in mining operations in the Thames-Coromandel area. In 1871 he was elected chairman of the Caledonian Gold Mining Company which two years

earlier had paid out over £½ million in its first year of operation.

In 1872 Crombie decided to leave New Zealand for good and return to England. Selling his photographic equipment to J. Cater, Crombie left most of his other investments intact. In a typically flamboyant gesture he and his wife gave a farewell ball in the Auckland town hall. In 1878, on the return journey from England to Auckland to look into some of his interests, Crombie died in Melbourne on 15 December. He was survived by his wife and five of his seven children.”

And so it was that John Nicol Crombie was buried in St. Kilda General Cemetery. His death certificate records his details as John Nicholas [sic] Crombie and that he died of syncope from pulmonary consumption at Balaclava Road, St. Kilda on 15 December 1878. The death certificate does not include any details of his wife or children. He was buried beneath a fine marble ledger monument in the Presbyterian “B” Compartment of the Cemetery.

(Source: Main, William “Crombie, John Nicol 1827 - 1878” Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, updated 7 April 2006 URL: [www.dnz.govt.nz](http://www.dnz.govt.nz); National Library of New Zealand “Papers Past” URL: [www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz](http://www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz))

**“In a typically flamboyant gesture he and his wife gave a farewell ball in the Auckland town hall”.**



Grave of John Nicol Crombie—Presbyterian “B” 0320



## 26-5-26: CARNAGE AND COURAGE AT CAULFIELD



Grave of John Mullins—Other Denominations "C" 55A at the St. Kilda General Cemetery

*" 'Mr Mullins,' said Coroner Daniel Berriman before continuing, 'what I want to know is not whether the signalman went out of his way to cause a catastrophe, but if the signalman in 'B' box had unwittingly given the release to 'A' box. Could the signalman in 'A' box possibly change the home signal from 'danger' to 'proceed'?"*

*'He could not, your Honour. The signal would not go to 'proceed'. We tested it after the accident and showed that the track locking apparatus was in order'.*

John [James] Zebedee Mullins (1868-1934), a block and signal inspector of the Victorian Railways Department was giving evidence at the Coronial inquiry before David Berriman (1866-1941) on 22 June 1926. The three day inquest was examining the deaths of Arthur James Beresford Upton, George Leonard Dudley Beames and William Hunter Dobney who died on the night of 26 May 1926. All three were interred at the



Grave of Martha Bates—Methodist "D" 40 at the St. Kilda General Cemetery

Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery, Charman Road, Cheltenham.

The Caulfield Railway disaster was a tragedy that affected the lives of many residents in Melbourne's south-east. Sadly, the event is virtually forgotten and little has been written on what remains the single most devastating tragedy to effect so many residents from the Glen Eira and Kingston municipalities.

Officially, the injury toll was three dead and 153 injured. The Friends of Cheltenham and Regional Cemeteries Inc. have produced a biographical register which shows as many as 173 suffered injuries. The 42,000 word register aims to remember not only the lives that were lost and those who were injured but also their families, the rescuers and the medical personnel who were affected in the first fatal accident on Melbourne's electrified railway system.

Twenty-four of the injured were hospitalised, including

Martha Bates (1880-1937) of 40 Moorabbin Road, Mentone. She was returning home with her sister Hilda (1896-1979) on the second class carriage at the rear of the Carrum train.

Both the driver of the Oakleigh train, William Milvain (1867-1939) and the guard, James Hargreaves (c1874-1955), were found guilty of manslaughter at the Coronial inquest. However, before Justice (Sir Frederick) Mann (1869-1958) at the Criminal Court, they were found not guilty. The jury believed *"the precautions taken to safeguard the public at this particular point are inadequate, and should be rectified immediately"*.

**The Caulfield Railway Disaster will be featured in the forthcoming tour of the Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery on Saturday 6 September 2008 at 2:00pm.**

*(Source: Biographical Register of the Caulfield Railway Disaster 26 May 1926 v2.15)*

## FRIENDS OF BOROONDARA (KEW) CEMETERY INC.

**Sunday 14 September 2008 – Stars of the Stage. This colourful tour visits the graves of Nellie Stewart, George Coppin, Bland Holt and others who entertained Melbourne.**

**Cost: \$15.00 (\$8.00 for members), including refreshments.**

**Bookings essential:**

**Telephone Tanya Warms on 9817 3717.**

**[www.fobkc.org](http://www.fobkc.org)**



## FORTHCOMING TOURS

### Tour of the Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery Saturday 6 September 2008 at 2.00pm

Led by the Friends of Cheltenham and Regional Cemeteries Inc., this general theme tour of the Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery features the most notorious land boomer from the 1880s and '90s, the first chairman of the Country Roads Board (VicRoads), the "father" of Sandringham, local pioneers, a well-known artist, the founder of Victoria's Maternal and Child Health Centres and three tragic events. Tour departs inside the main gates, Charman Road, Cheltenham (opposite Cheltenham Railway Station).

### St. Kilda General Cemetery Highlights Thursday 9 October 2008 at 10.00am

This mid-week tour will visit the grave of heroic soldier Captain Albert Jacka VC, botanist Baron Sir Ferdinand von Mueller and other notable figures. This leisurely stroll through the Cemetery is conducted as part of the Victorian Seniors' Festival.

### Notable Celebrities

### Sunday 2 November 2008 at 2.00pm

Led by Kay Rowan this tour will focus on notable celebrities buried in St. Kilda General Cemetery.

#### General tour details:

Unless otherwise indicated, all tours of St. Kilda Cemetery leave from the main entrance gates on Dandenong Road, St. Kilda East (Melways Map 58 - F9).

Tour cost: \$10.00 for adults (except where indicated). Members of the Friends of St. Kilda Cemetery and children (under 18 years) are free.

Bookings: Places are limited and pre-booking is required by contacting (03) 9531 6832.

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.

## MINDLESS CEMETERY ATTACK

A vandal mindlessly attacked about fifty monuments at St. Kilda General Cemetery on Friday 8 August 2008. This was the third major incident of vandalism to have occurred in recent years.

Cemetery staff were alerted while the attack was in progress and contacted the police. A 24-year-old male was chased by police and resisted arrest. He was finally detained and, according to the *Emerald Hill Times*, was taken to the Alfred Hospital for psychiatric assessment. Police said that the offender would be interviewed after he was released from medical care.

About fifty graves and monuments were damaged in the attack although cemetery staff were still cataloguing the extent of the damage. Unfortunately, given the age of many of the monuments, it would be virtually impossible to contact descendants.

The area most affected by the attack appears to have been the Presbyterian "C" Compart-



A vandalised grave from the Presbyterian "C" Compartment.

ment of the Cemetery and adjacent areas. It would seem that vases, urns, rails and other loose objects were used to damage monuments. Some of the damage would be irreparable even if families were to come forward.

Anyone with information that might assist the police should contact Senior Constable Stephen Boyle of St. Kilda Police on 9536 2626.

Families of the deceased who seek further information should contact the Springvale Botanical Cemetery on 8558 8205.

(Source: *Emerald Hill Times* 20-26 Aug 2008)

## ELIZABETH HORE-GUEST SPEAKER AT THE AGM

Staglieno Cemetery in Genoa, Italy is one of the significant cemeteries in Europe. Its sculptural and artistic portrayals make it an art gallery in itself. In contrast, the English Cemetery in Florence is forgotten, bereft of support, and crumbling, and yet contains the graves of many English artists and literati who lived in Florence in the

C19, including the Trollope family, the great Pre-Raphaelite artist William Holman Hunt's wife, the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and much more. See and hear this wonderful visual portrayal of two contrasting Italian cemeteries at the forthcoming AGM on Sunday 28 September 2008...and learn why cemeteries universally need our support.

