Cemetery Conversations

THOMAS MONAHAN: HOTELIER, BUSINESSMAN AND COW KEEPER

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

A short biography of Thomas "Tom" Monahan is given by J B Cooper in *The History of St Kilda*. To quote:

"He was born in Dublin, in the year 1812. He left Kingston to join the ship 'North Britain,' which left London for Sydney on August 13, 1839. Much overladen, she carried 260 migrants for Australia. Of that number no less than ninety emigrants died on the voyage, due to 'ship fever,' typhus, arising from the awful insanitary conditions prevailing on these early emigrant ships, the want of fresh water, the lack of proper food, the crowded conditions of the cabins, or holds, the long periods over which these voyages of death extended. To Monahan the tragedy of the fever ship, 'Glen Huntly,' must have seemed a mild one, when he recalled memories of the coffin ship, the 'North Britain,' in which he, an Irish youth, travelled to the land of his adoption, where he was to make a large fortune. He had every reason to have a close acquaintance with the fever cases of the 'North Britain,' since he had served as a hospital assistant for seven years at Kildare, and it was as a hospital assistant he embarked on the 'North Britain.' When he landed at Sydney, in the beginning of 1840, the doctor onboard the 'North Britain,' gave to him a testimonial unrestricted in appreciation of Monahan's worth. On February 22, 1841 he married Miss Timms of Sydney. In the same year he left Sydney, and came to Melbourne, where he opened the Port Phillip Club Hotel, in Lonsdale Street. In 1845, he built the Queen's Arms Hotel in Swanston Street…at the corner of Flinders Lane. Not so long before Monahan's arrival at Port Phillip, the Melbourne Hospital consisted of a log hut of two rooms, which served the settlers as a post office, a police office, and a hospital. Later, a house in Collins Street, at the back of Temple Court, was used as a hospital. When, in 1846, the foundation stone of the hospital in Little Lonsdale Street, was laid, Monahan was one of the first subscribers to the institution. He also donated to its funds £20, and became one of the first life governors of the hospital…

The Hon. J Alston Wallace married, in 1875, the second daughter of Thomas Monahan. Wallace came to Melbourne in 1852, engaged in hotel, store and mining activities on the goldfields and made a large fortune [John Wallace is also buried in St. Kilda Cemetery]. His future father-in-law, Monahan tried a mining adventure at Buckland, where Wallace had been successful,

and he lost £7,000. After that he [Monahan] confined himself to building. Like his rich neighbour, James Mason, he favored hotel properties. Both had acted as publicans, both made fortunes, both were well known characters of St. Kilda. Monahan had a somewhat florid complexion, with an Irish type of face, and he wore a white beard. He was a well set, sturdy man and he collected his own rents. We have seen him enter the Queen's Arms, Swanston Street, evidently for that purpose. So well known was he as a Melbourne character, that we have heard bystanders say in Swanston Street, 'there goes Tom Monahan.' It was said of Monahan, in 'The Victorian Men of the Time' that 'he never gave a bill, or a bond, an I.O.U. or a mortgage, but that he had taken many. He always paid in cash, for great, or small things.' He was what is called, a 'self made man,' who had a natural talent for finance, but it was Mrs Monahan, skilled with the pen, who kept his books."

Cooper also provides an interesting aside to Monahan's life. To quote:

"Cows, their pastures, and

THOMAS MONAHAN: HOTELIER, BUSINESSMAN AND COW KEEPER...CONTINUED

(Continued from page 1)

their impoundings, were very animated questions among residents of St. Kilda, since so many of them kept cows. We have seen a note wherein the wealthy Tom Monahan was described as a cow keeper. He did, in fact, at the bluestone residence he built and called "Erindale", in Brighton Road, keep a beautiful herd of Alderney cows, and his wife sold their rich milk as a regular custom to those who went for it. 'Erindale' after Monahan's death was pulled down, the estate was subdivided and a nest of villas hides the once well known place. From 'Erindale', we have been told, Monahan rode almost every morning, an old roan horse which he stabled at Kenney's Baths, while he had his bath in the sea."

Erindale was a large property of some 16 acres on the east side of Brighton Road, south of Glen Eira Road. Still standing on Monahan's land is the mansion *Quat Quatta* which was built in 1890 for Monahan's widowed daughter, Mrs Betsy Keogh. In 1893, Monahan's son-in-law, The Hon. John Wallace MLC, required a 'town house' due to his political commitments in Melbourne. Consequently, he acquired the *Quat Quatta* estate in Ripponlea, consisting of 11 acres of rose gardens, tennis court and stables.

Thomas Monahan died on 25 May 1889 at his home, *Erindale*. He was survived by one daughter, Mrs Betsy Keogh, a widow with four children, and by his son-in-law and executor, John Wallace, a widower with six children. His estate was valued at more than £950,000 after tax.

Come on our 'Old Favourites and New Finds' tour on Sunday 28 February at 10:30am and hear more about Thomas Monahan.

(Sources: Cooper, J. B. (ed.), "The History of St Kilda" (1931); Mellor, S. G., "Monahan, Thomas (1812-1889)", Australian Dictionary of Biography—Online Edition, Australian National University, 2006, http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A050307b.htm)

(above) Grave of Thomas Monahan and family—RC "B" 408

(above) *Quat Quatta* which was built in 1890 for Thomas Monahan's daughter

FROM THE ST. KILDA COURT: WALLY WATER WASTERS...FROM 1872

Judging by this case before the St. Kilda Court in 1872, water wasters is not a problem of the modern-era.

"The officers of the Public Works department yesterday, at the St. Kilda Court, proceeded against a number of householders for wasting the Yan Yean water. The first case, which was against Mr. D, McNaughton, the mayor of St. Kilda, was postponed for one week. The other persons summoned were Messrs. A. Benjamin, W. Pritchard, C. Ankers, and F. Gardiner, Dr. Black, and Mrs. Moody. Mr. Dwyer, who appeared on behalf of the department, stated that there was 10,000,000gal. of water wasted daily in Melbourne and the suburbs. The Bench, after hearing the evidence in the cases of Messrs. Benjamin, Pritchard, and Ankers, and Mrs. Moody, said they considered the cases against them were not proved, and dismissed them. They, however, held that the charges against Mr. Gardiner and Dr. Black were proved; but inflicted fines of only 2s. 6d. each, as they considered the department ought to give a full supply to ratepayers instead of an intermittent one, and it might be that the waste had occurred through parties leaving their taps turned on when there was no water in the pipes, and the water afterwards running away when it came, before it was discovered that it was escaping. Dr. Patterson and Mr. [Henry] Tullett presided at the court."

Note: C Ankers is likely to be Charles Ankers who died in August 1910 aged 75 (Meth "B" 0434). A Benjamin may refer to Abraham Benjamin who was buried in August 1912 aged 70 (Jewish "B" 076).

(Source: The Argus 27 Jan 1872 p5)

(above) Grave of Henry Tullett at the St. Kilda Cemetery. As Mayor, Tullett presided over many cases that came before the St. Kilda Court.

"Seest thou a man diligent in his business. He shall stand before kings"

CLOSING THE ST. KILDA CEMETERY: SURVIVING THE SCARE OF '68

Final of the three part series on the attempt to close the St. Kilda Cemetery in the 1860s...

A second resolution was passed by Cr. White and seconded by Mr Hole;

"That this meeting would further urge that all persons signing that petition [to urge the closure] have come to reside in the neighbourhood of the cemetery since it was proclaimed and set apart for its present purposes; consequently, these persons must have come to reside near the cemetery, and the cemetery had not been brought near to them...".

(above) Grave of Benjamin Cowderoy— CofE "A" 321A

The meeting was to pass a final resolution, moved by Mr Crews MLA that the closing of the Cemetery was subversive of the people's established rights, was exceedingly offensive and repugnant to their feelings, and not warranted by any reason urged in the petition.

It was obvious that while there was support for the closure of the St. Kilda Cemetery, the feeling of support was stronger.

The meeting before Hon. B Williams MLC, Commissioner of Public Works held on 3 September 1868 opposing the proposition was reported in *The Argus*. The petition to close the Cemetery had over 885 signatures after a public meeting. But as the Mayor of St. Kilda, Dr Patterson pointed out;

"The few gentlemen who wished the cemetery to be closed had been three years in preparing their petition, and had, after all, succeeded in getting only fifty signatures, while many of the persons who had signed were dead or had left the district".

The deputation would counter the petition by presenting the signatures of 1,389 inhabitants of the Prahran borough. A further 136 residents from other localities added their support.

Benjamin Cowderoy was at the meeting as a representative of the Cemetery Trust. In a passionate plea, he argued that;

"...if the cemetery were closed great injustice would be done to the persons who had purchased ground there. A large number of graves had been purchased for the purpose of future interments and if the application to close the cemetery were granted the trustees considered that the right of individuals would be unwarrantably interfered with. Besides this, if the cemetery were closed, there would be no funds to keep it in order, and what was now an ornament to the locality would become an offence and nuisance to the neighbourhood."

Cowderoy went on to state that 2,000 graves were occupied since the Cemetery opened in mid-1855 and accurately predicted that at *"...the present rate of interment there would be plenty of spare for thirty or forty years to come".*

In reply to the deputation, the head of the Department of Public Works, Mr Jones acknowledged the *"very strong feeling on the part of St. Kilda and Prahran".* Jones promised a full inquiry and considered it his duty to visit the Cemetery *"in order to satisfy himself with respect to the reported unsalubrity".* Jones made it clear he supported the Cemetery remaining open. But Jones also acknowledged that if the health of the living was affected he would not hesitate in advising the Governor in Council to close the St. Kilda Cemetery. He supported the location of cemeteries away from the centres of population and for those, that had already been established, *"he thought they should not be disturbed, unless unanswerable cases were made out against them".*

As we know from history, the petition was unsuccessful but it goes to show how early in the Cemetery's history that an attempt was made to have it closed.

(Source: The Argus 8 Jul 1868 p5, 24 Jul 1868 p5, 1 Aug 1868 p5 & 4 Sep 1868 p6)

> *"It was obvious that while there was support for the closure of the St. Kilda Cemetery, the feeling of support was stronger".*

FORTHCOMING TOURS

Old Favourites and New Finds
Sunday 28 February 2010 at 10.30am

Tour leader: Geoff Austin. Come and explore the St. Kilda Cemetery on our first tour for 2010.

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Funerary Symbols and Cemetery History
Sunday 14 March 2010 at 2.00pm

Tour leader: Kay Rowan.

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The Boer War
Sunday 11 April 2010 at 2.00pm

Tour leader: Glen Turnbull.

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Coroners, Constabulary and Crime
Sunday 23 May 2010 at 2.00pm

Tour leader: Elizabeth Hore.

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 for adults (except where indicated). Members of the Friends of St. Kilda Cemetery and children (under 18 years) are free.

Bookings: Reservations for all tours are essential. Numbers are limited.

Book now on (03) 9531 6832 to avoid disappointment.

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.

THE SAD CASE OF DIPHTHERIA

An article in *The Argus* of 27 December 1889 reported the sad tale of William Steel who died from diphtheria which also claimed three of his family in the space of two days. According to the on-line burial register, Keith, 3, and Claud Steel, 6, were both buried on 20 December 1889, followed by Hilda, 3, two days later. William died on Christmas Day, but his date of burial is incorrectly recorded as being 22 December.

"Closely following upon the loss which the Public Works department sustained through the death of Mr. C. Le Cren, who so efficiently carried on the work of secretary of the department, another gap has been made in the ranks of the most capable officers of that department by the demise of Mr. William H. Steel, who expired at his residence on Christmas morning. Mr. Steel joined the service in 1857, and gradually worked his way up till he occupied the position of inspector-general of the professional branch. During his period of office he has carried out and designed many important works, including the Alfred Graving Dock, the works at the Gippsland Lakes Entrance, the breakwaters in the harbour at Warrnambool and Portland, and the Belfast harbour improvement, all of which were approved of by Sir John Coode. He also took a great interest in the fortification of the colony, and the schemes of defence which he prepared from time to time have received the highest praise from the various military authorities who have reported upon them. Mr. Steel caught diphtheria about a fortnight ago, and unfortunately communicated it to three of his family, all of whom died within two days. When Mr. Steel heard of his sad bereavements he abandoned all hope of his own recovery, and though he was supposed by his medical attendants to have passed through the most alarming stage of the disease, he died on Christmas morning. His body was buried in the St. Kilda Cemetery yesterday, and the funeral, though semi-private in character, was largely attended by leading citizens and his fellow officers, by whom he was held in the highest esteem. The unusually painful circumstances of the case had aroused the keenest sympathy with Mr. Steel, and his death will cause great regret".

All four members of the Steel family were buried in Pres "B" 0100. *(Source: The Argus 27 Dec 1889 p4)*

(left) The Steel family graves at the St. Kilda Cemetery— Pres "B" 099-0102