

ALBURY CEMETERIES: ALIVE & WELL

Edited talk by Jan Hunter (presented at A&DHS General Meeting, July 2012 and reprinted from A&DHS Bulletin No 526)

Cemeteries are places where we bury our dead but they are alive with the stories of individuals, families and our community. Yes, they tell stories from the past – some sad, some inspiring but cemeteries also raise questions. Why is the cemetery where it is? Who looks after cemeteries? When did we begin cremations in Albury? Let's look at the stories of Albury cemeteries and their continuing part in our city's life. And, in that sense, we'll see that Albury Cemeteries are Alive and Well.

EARLY DAYS

In the very early days of Albury's settlement there was an Aboriginal burial ground in South Albury. It was known as The Sandhills and was on the site of Waite's Park, bounded by Olive, David, Ebdon and Hovell Streets. As the first European settlers died, they too were interred in the same place.

Very quickly, this arrangement proved unsatisfactory and in 1849 Townsend set aside land for a new cemetery to the north of the town. But no-body bothered much about the new site. However, during the 1850s, with Albury growing, sand was removed from the original cemetery for building works. Human remains were scattered about and a great furore erupted when a bone was found in the sand being used for paving outside a Dean Street shop.

In 1862, the magistrate, Captain Brownrigg, officially ordered the re-interment of all bones from the old site and the David Street cemetery was gazetted in 1867.

PIONEER CEMETERY

The Pioneer Cemetery (as it is now known) was laid out in a pattern of four sections, along religious lines – the major religions having the largest lots. Within those larger lots, space was set aside for smaller groups, including Chinese and Unsectarian, Jewish residents and Seventh Day Adventists.

There were problems with the management of the 'new' cemetery for decades. Trustees were appointed from the various denominations but the financial arrangements were difficult. A sexton or caretaker was appointed, but even then the overall care of the cemetery was lax. "Disgrace" was a word much used by the newspapers and the council. Cattle and pigs grazing; rabbits eroding the stones and plinths; the road to the Cemetery full of stumps; and fences falling down. It was all a disgrace to the community.

SYMBOLISM & MASONS

In the 19th Century, funerals were very elaborate and headstones ornate and symbolic. A broken column indicated a life cut short; a cherub or angel, the grave of a child; an urn – often draped – was a symbol of the ashes of mourning, and the book represented a Knowledge of Life or the Bible and the dove is the Holy Spirit.

Most of these headstones were made by local stone masons including A D Livie, Dickson & Son, Ballantyne, Molloy and Thomas Greenfield. Greenfield Park is named after Thomas and he lived in a house, overlooking the Park. Greenfield advertised extensively over a long working life. His



workshop and yard were on the corner of Kiewa and Englehardt Streets, on the site of the former Hume Shire building.

Other stone masons included the Bennett Bros from England, who bought the Molloy business and worked next door to the current K Mart Complex. The partnership dissolved but one brother continued with his trade. Some may remember John Bennett's home and workshop which were just across the road from the Pioneer Cemetery at the end of David Street.

Some of the cast iron and wrought iron grave railings in the Pioneer Cemetery were locally made by blacksmiths like John L McEachern, L Schneider and J P Laughton.

EX-SERVICE GRAVES

Prior to 1934, the RSL identified the graves of World War I ex-servicemen. They found 23 not being tended, so cleared the grass around those and arranged for each grave to have a simple concrete border and headstone, with a rising sun. On Anzac Day that year, 500 people gathered for a special service. Each grave was covered with an Australian or Union Jack flag. On a signal from a bugle, a Boy Scout removed the flag and placed the laurel wreath of peace on each grave. Historical Society stalwart, the late Ron Braddy was one of those Boy Scouts.

In general cemeteries, ex-servicemen's graves are often signified by a rising sun or a laurel wreath plaque placed on the grave stone. Today, the RSL facilitates the placing of these emblems through the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

CHILDREN

The deaths of very young children are recorded on many headstones, usually in the same space as their parents. But there are clusters of small graves in the cemetery which are not named. In the past, stillborn or short-lived babies were not always acknowledged in a public way. Around 2000, a group of middle aged people approached Darren Eddy of Lester and Son asking for his help in erecting a memorial on which names could be recorded. Darren went to the Albury Council who facilitated and paid for the erection of this stone cairn. There is provision for names to be recorded. Any family who has lost a young babe or sibling at any time may add names to this memorial.

In 1949, between July and September, 13 children from the Bonegilla Migrant Camp died of malnutrition in the Albury Hospital. There was a great deal of publicity looking for an explanation and shifting of blame. Various reasons were given including the condition of the children before they left for Australia. Another explanation was that there was a gastro outbreak on the ship bringing the migrants and the children were given sugar and water only which weakened them fatally, and then the conditions at Bonegilla were also blamed. Perhaps a combination of all factors? The cluster of graves is very poignant.

CHINESE GRAVES

[See Bulletin 514 July 2011, for a report on the Cemetery Walk by Pauline Harbick and Chris McQuellin.]

LYCHGATE

In the mid nineteen eighties, Gerry Curtis, president of the A&DHS became interested in a photograph of the 1934 Anzac Day service which showed a structure at the cemetery gates. Under his leadership the Society decided to build a lychgate to replicate the original.

Lychgate means Corpse Gate and in the past the funeral procession paused there while part of the burial service was read. Ken Young de-signed the gate; public donations in money and kind were sought and given; TAFE took on the project and the gate was built by carpentry apprentices. The sparkling new lychgate was opened in 1987.

WAUGH ROAD

In the past, a rule of thumb for the location of cemeteries was one mile out of town so that mourners could walk and not have to hire a horse drawn or motorized vehicle. Prior to 1920 Albury Municipal Council had purchased land in Wagga Road Lavington and opposite the present Peard's Nursery in East Albury. However these sites were deemed too far away, so council began to look at land surrounding the existing cemetery. Nearby landholders objected. They said that the town was expanding in that direction so land should be reserved for residential use.

The landholders included Stanton's Nursery, on the corner of Stephen and David Streets. Stanton's had a small shop at the side of their house where you could buy fresh flowers for the graves, order wreaths or buy a fresh orange from their nursery.

Spencers also objected. They had a dairy farm in Fallon Street, on the site of the Kandeer School, next to James Fallon High. But the Council decided to buy land which had originally belonged to the Kolb Family; do some rearranging of the roads in that vicinity and to open another cemetery on the corner of Fallon Street and what is now Waugh Road.

WAR CEMETERY

The Albury War Cemetery in Waugh Road was begun by the Australian Army but in 1949 the War Graves Commission took over responsibility for it.

The first burials in this cemetery were of the 23 servicemen and one woman killed when a bus and train collided in Thomas Mitchell Drive in Wodonga in May 1943. Their funeral was the biggest Albury had ever seen, with the procession one and a half km long. At the funeral, five services were held simultaneously and the 24 coffins were lowered at the same time.

There are now 96 graves in the War Cemetery. A Cross of Sacrifice stands in the central path, flanked by the marble headstones.

COUNCIL TAKES OVER

By 1950 the Albury City Council had finally decided to take over the running of the cemetery. Roy Collings was Town Clerk at the time and he tried to gather up the relevant documentation from the churches. This proved difficult as several church trustees were very reluctant to hand over their registers.

The Roman Catholic trustee had a theological reason for not wanting to give up their right to administer their portion of the cemetery. Roman Catholics hold the view that a burial site is holy ground. In 1950, the Cold War was at its height and many thought that the Communists would take over the world. The local priest feared that if the Albury City Council became Communist, people might be buried in mass graves in unconsecrated grounds so he fought against the secularisation of the Cemetery. However, the Council finally prevailed and has been in charge of the Albury cemeteries since 1951.

GLENMORUS

The Glenmorus Memorial Gardens at the western end of Union Road Lavington were set up in 1971. Previously any cremations took place in Melbourne.

This Cemetery is a lawn cemetery with plaques for both cremations and burials. It is in a beautiful setting, nestling into the hills and looking to the mountains. The chapel and office are built on the site of Thomas Affleck's house, "Glenmorus". The name is made up of "glen" the setting of the home, and "morus" which comes from the Latin, meaning Mulberry. The Afflecks had mulberry trees there and they ran a silk farm. Affleck Street and the Crematorium honour this man who was owner of the Border Post newspaper for 25 years.

ST JOHNS THURGOONA

Strictly speaking, this cemetery is not an Albury cemetery. It is a private one which is allowed in NSW. The graves are on the site of the former St John's Orphanage at Thurgoona. Run by the Sisters of Mercy, the first grave is dated 1880, although that nun was re-interred here when the orphanage opened a few years later. Nuns and priests and six girls were buried here, but the cemetery was closed in 1978.

However, in 2007 the Mercy Order gave permission for the land to be used again for burials of local Religious. In the interim about 20 other nuns or priests have been buried throughout Glenmorris Cemetery.

INDIAN CEMETERY

On a very early map of Albury there is a section designated "Cemetery" just a little to the south-east of Wagga Road Lavington. It is marked "Unsectarian Burial Ground." This area is now Jelbart Park bounded by Moore Street, Nowland Avenue and Kaylock Road. It was known as the Indian Burial Ground, but the Indian hawkers who died in Albury were cremated and most ashes were sent back to India.

In 1928 a cremation took place at Jelbart Park. We have an account from a lady who was a child living nearby at the time. On her way to school, she saw the funeral pyre being prepared with wood and "lots of butter". When she came home that afternoon, there was only a heap of ashes remaining. The paper recorded the dead man was a "votary of Buddhism" but it is most likely he was a Sikh, as were the majority of hawkers in Australia.

One might say this cemetery is not alive and well anymore. However the presence of the hundreds of people who play sport there every week tells another story.

MAINTENANCE

A primary aim of AlburyCity is that all the Cemeteries are kept in good order, with easy access to all parts. In recent years the Green Corps and those on Community Orders have helped with maintenance. A great deal of drainage has taken place in the Pioneer section so that the walkways are as dry as possible.

RECORDS

There is a map at the front gates of the cemeteries, some markers have been installed and signs put up to direct people. Currently, AlburyCity is checking all the records for accuracy with a view to having an extensive data base, complete with photos of the headstones in all the cemeteries. This is taking some time.

Meanwhile there are cemetery records in the Albury LibraryMuseum, including a transcription of each headstone in the Pioneer Cemetery, done by the late Audrey Summerill in the early eighties. Photos have been taken of the headstones in the Pioneer Cemetery and there is a CD of these also at the LibraryMuseum.

CONCLUSION

As you can see, Albury cemeteries are not only the stories of death and dying in the past, but a continuing story of life in this city – and in that respect, Albury Cemeteries are Alive and Well.