

Trailblazer's reign

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Travis Sellers at the grave of Violet Murrell at Cheltenham Memorial Park. Chris Eastman.

WHILE most racegoers are focused on Caulfield and Flemington, Cheltenham and Mentone have their own racing history.

In the 1930s, Mentone's champion horsewoman Violet Murrell broke barriers in the male-dominated world of horse racing.

During her lifetime, it is said, she won more trophies than any other woman in the world.

Friends of Cheltenham and Regional Cemeteries' member Travis Sellers said Murrell was a trailblazer.

"As a horsewoman, she was without peer and could match up with many male riders," Mr Sellers said.

"If Violet was alive today, she may even have won a Melbourne Cup."

The Friends group recently held a "75 years on" tour of the Cheltenham Memorial Park, where Murrell is buried.

In the early hours of March 24, 1934 Murrell courageously tried to save her beloved horse Garryowen from a stable fire. She later died from burns. Together the pair had won more than 200 prizes and sashes.

Mr Sellers said Murrell was an inspiration for female riders.

"Violet was one of the first to overturn the Victoria Racing Club ban on lady jockeys riding at city and metropolitan races."

Murrell's legacy lives on. The Garryowen Trophy is a highly prized event at the Royal Melbourne Show and pays tribute to her trailblazing ways.

The Friends group runs private tours of Cheltenham Memorial Park, where guides tell Murrell's courageous story and those of other well-known identities.

Details: focrc.org or 5420 7671.

<http://www.whereilive.com.au>

