



# AROUND THE GRAVES

RESEARCH RESTORE REMEMBER

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NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF CHELTENHAM AND REGIONAL CEMETERIES INC.

## The Centenarians

Work on our first booklet *The Centenarians: Life's Quiet Sunset* is now in the final stages of production and is due for release in February 2010. Featuring the genealogical details of 28 centenarians who lie buried at the Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery, the booklet also includes a number of interesting newspaper articles.

Centenarian Amanda (Marie) Lazarus n<sup>èe</sup> Bateson (1890-1993) was thrice married. Her second husband, Arthur James Monk was the son of Cheltenham market gardener James Cree Monk (1854-1935) and they resided at 5 Mernda Avenue, Glenthuntly. The Monks were the owners of an unoccupied shop on Charman Road that was damaged when a cyclone swept through the town in October 1936;

### **"CYCLONE AT CHELTENHAM / TRAIL OF RUIN / £2,000 Damage to Property / BOY SERIOUSLY INJURED**

Sweeping through the shopping centre of Cheltenham at 4.30 p.m. yesterday, a cyclone left a trail of ruin. Shops were wrecked, houses unroofed, windows shattered, and trees uprooted, the damage being estimated at more than £2,000.



above:  
Gravesite of Arthur and  
Amanda (Marie) Monk-  
CofC "42" 13

A boy [Robert Street, 11] who was struck on the head by falling bricks was seriously injured, and several other persons received lacerations and bruises...

*In a strip of country only about 50 yards in width, but extending in length as far as Dingley, four miles distant, the cyclone lifted roofs like*

*paper, blew down brick walls and verandahs, uprooted trees, and shattered windows.*

*Many persons had narrow escapes. Portion of a huge pine tree fell on a garage proprietor, a girl was blown along a street for 50 yards, and a baby was removed from a room only a few minutes before a beam of wood tore through the wall like a spear." (Source: The Argus 31 Oct 1936 p7)*

## Letter to the Editor

At some point in a cemetery's history, complaints are invariably made on its neglected state and few of the major Melbourne cemeteries have avoided such criticism. For the Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery, this occurred in the 1930s, soon after the opening of the Cheltenham Memorial Park.

*"Sir.—As a grave holder in the Cheltenham Cemetery, I am tempted to ask why this cemetery is neglected at the expense of the new cemetery. Obviously the new cemetery was brought into being with the funds held by the trustees of the Cheltenham Cemetery. This cemetery is an eyesore, with the paths and tracks covered by weeds, and a general air of neglect. It is impossible for one set of workmen to be in both cemeteries. When one compares the Brighton Cemetery or the St. Kilda Cemetery with the old Cheltenham Cemetery, a feeling of despair comes over one. Could not the Government see that the cemetery is cleaned, that paths and main roads are constructed of something solid and permanent and that funds are used in this cemetery to its benefit and not to its expense?—*

*—Yours, &c*

*Feb 5.*

*MOURNER."*

"Mourner's" letter is in contrast with late 1930 when the local *Moorabbin News* said "The trust is to be commended on its new innovation at the Cheltenham cemetery, where about 10,000 feet of brick footpaths have been constructed, which have given a very distinctive appearance to the cemetery. This...together with a general improvement to the appearance of the older portion of the cemetery, proves the trust's desire to serve the public..."

**Footnote: We'll include the reply to "Mourner's" letter from Trust Chairman George Brownfield in the next issue of *Around the Graves*.** (Source: *Moorabbin News* 29 Nov 1930 p1 & *The Argus* 6 Feb 1935 p9)

# Benvenuto: Cheltenham's own Underbelly

*In our own take on Melbourne's bloody gangland war (1995-2004), we look into the death of Francesco (Frank) Benvenuto, gunned down in Beaumaris and reveal his killer...*

**B**ack in the 1960s, the Queen Victoria market was the graveyard of the N'Dranghita during what became known as the 'Market Murders'. Indeed, there were fewer dangerous jobs in Melbourne than being an Italian fruit and vegetable dealer. The power struggle within the Calabrian-based Honored Society that resulted in the tit-for-tat murders was for more than the title of 'Godfather'. The ultimate, and far more lucrative prize was to gain control of the extortion racket that operated at the Market.

The man who emerged victorious from the bloodshed was Liborio Benvenuto (1927-88), but by 1988, Liborio was confined to bed with severe health problems. As his time was nearing to meet his maker, a successor had to be anointed. In May, he summoned his 40-year-old son Frank and son-in-law Alphonso Muratore to his death bed. Muratore was chosen over Frank Benvenuto but in a shock move, Muratore declined and a year later he left his wife for a mistress. Born on 15 December 1947, Frank Benvenuto was the natural leader to take over control and he made his presence felt immediately. His brother-in-law Alphonso was on borrowed time since leaving Angela Benvenuto. And then he sealed his own fate when he tried to offer the major buyers better produce at a cheaper rate than the corrupt system overseen by the Honored Society. It was the ultimate act of betrayal of the sacred Omertà—the code of silence. So two weeks after Alphonso Muratore met executives of Coles-Myer, he was shot dead in front of his Hampton home on 4 August 1992. Muratore's killer was never found though Frank Benvenuto was named at the

inquest as the prime suspect.

Victor Peirce was born into one of Australia's most notorious crime families—the Pettingills headed by matriarch Kathleen Pettingill. They were an "old working-class family that never worked" as one report

lucidly described the clan. Somehow Benvenuto and the Pettingills formed an alliance of mutual convenience. Another of Benvenuto's employees was a cherub former altar boy at the Sunshine Greek Orthodox Church—a kid named Andrew 'Benji' Veniamin (1975-2004). Veniamin would later go onto bigger things as the 'trigger man' and lieutenant of pudgy baby-face killer Carl Williams, the former supermarket shelf-stacker currently serving an enforced 35-year holiday at Barwon Prison for murder and drug trafficking.

Francesco Benvenuto had a habit of saying "God bless you" at the end of a conversation. But there was no help from God on Monday 8 May 2000, when he became the eighth victim of the bloody gangland wars...

**Find out who killed Frank Benvenuto by downloading the entire 2,400 word article from the Members' area of our website.**



above:  
Mausoleum crypt of Frank Benvenuto at the Cheltenham Memorial Park:

*"Eternal rest grant unto him o Lord  
May perpetual light shine upon him"*

## From Cheltenham...to France

*While in France, the Friends laid a rose at the graves of a few soldiers whose parents lie buried at the Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery...*



*Travis and Vivienne Sellers at the grave of Robert Harris (above) and Thomas Price (right)*

*Herbert Organ (far left) and John Ryan (left)*

