



AROUND THE GRAVES

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NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF CHELTENHAM AND REGIONAL CEMETERIES INC.

1853 Petition for a Post Office

In our previous issue of *Around the Graves*, we featured a story on the founding fathers of the Cheltenham Christ Church to illustrate that the history of the locality is intertwined with the Cheltenham cemeteries. In this article, we look at the pioneers of the district who signed a petition in 1853 for a post office and who lie buried in the Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery.

The year 1853 can be described as the turning point in the locality when slowly the district began to take shape. The catalyst was the first Crown land sales and with that came not only the market gardeners and farmers, but the shop



(above)
The family grave of Mary Ann and Thomas Tilley—Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery (CofE "E" 6-7)

owners. Of the 118 names who signed the petition some 12 years before the Pioneer Cemetery was established, as many as 31 are buried in the Cemetery. It would be a further four years before Cheltenham finally received the long awaited post office.

Arthur Buckley (CofE "E" 192) was just the eighth interment at the Cemetery when he died in August 1865 who along with his father **Benjamin** (CofE "E" 193) were amongst the many Cheltenham gardeners to sign the petition. They both lie in unadorned gravesites. Buried nearby is **George Bates** (CofE "E" 204), another Cheltenham gardener who also lies in an unadorned grave. He was just 49 years at the time of his death in 1875.

The only female to sign the petition who is buried at the Cemetery is **Mary Ann Tilley** (CofE "E" 6) wife of **Thomas Tilley** (CofE "E" 6). The Tilley family moved to Cheltenham in 1853 and Thomas would later purchase 12 allotments in Herald Street, Cheltenham.

All but two of the petitioners were to see out their final

years in the locality. **Alfred Docwra** (CofE "E" 242) died at Windsor in 1903 while **George Gomm** (CofE "E" 101) passed away at Fitzroy. Gomm is possibly the father of **Henry Gomm** (Bap "B" 49) who died at the Melbourne Benevolent Asylum in December 1916 aged 82.



(above)
The grave of William Wraight—Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery (Meth "E" 44)

A majority of the signatories were gardeners/farmers from Cheltenham. The exceptions were **John Holdsworth** (Pres "A" 64)

whose occupation is noted as a Teacher. **Henry McKittrick** (Meth "E" 244) is listed as being a Bootmaker, **Charles Tuck** (Meth "E" 295) of the well-known Tuck family is noted as a Veterinary Surgeon while **George Hughes'** (CofE "D" 74) occupation is a Labourer.

The gardeners include **John Backhouse** (Meth "E" 74), **Alfred Burgess** (Meth "E" 210) and **John Miller jnr** (CofE "E" 14), who were all from South Brighton; while Cheltenham is represented by **George Beazeley [Beazley]** (CofE "E" 151), **William Moore** (Meth "E" 87), **John Ross** (Meth "E" 142), and **William Wraight** (Meth "E" 44) who died in October 1891 aged 82.

Others who signed the petition include **Henry Comport** (CofE "E" 246), a Cemetery Trustee and Moorabbin Shire Councillor (1864-69, 1879-89), **Samuel Judd** (CofC "A" 83), **Nicholas Le Page** (CofC "A" 75) and **William Ruse** (CofC "A" 20) who were founders of the Cheltenham Christ Church, **William Bally** (CofC "A" 46) who lived to the ripe old age of 90, and **George Barber** (CofE "E" 170) who died in August 1919 having outlived the other petitioners.

But the most interesting of all those who signed the 1853 petition was a humble farmer. His name is **John Blencowe** (Meth "E" 71) and his story is told overleaf...

(Source: Sheehy, T., "1979 Pioneer Settlers, Moorabbin" Vol 1 No 4)

John Blencowe, Convict

(An edited extract by Kevin Gibson, reproduced with permission)

John Blencowe was the son of Francis Blencowe and Elizabeth n^{ée} Clements, born on 19 Oct 1820 at Middleton Cheney, Northamptonshire. John was my great, great grandfather. He is just one of just four known convicts who lie buried at the Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery.

From the *North Hampton Mercury* of 7 Mar 1840;

“John Blencowe was charged with having, at the parish of Brackley St. St Peters, feloniously stolen three nightcaps,

three pairs of stockings, and sundry other articles, the property of his master, Wm. King Malins. & Mr. Miller for the prosecution, called Wm. King Malins. The prisoner was in my service on the 18th January last, I directed my two female servants to search the prisoner’s room, and found property concealed. Next morning we found the shawls hid among some paper hangings; and on Sunday the 19th January I found a black handkerchief; I there after found some of the property in the pockets of the prisoner’s jacket.

When the policeman apprehended the prisoner we found the rest of the property in the room where it was first discovered. (Marriot the police officer produced the property which the prosecutor identified) Susanna Smith deposed that she discovered the property in the prisoner’s room and told her master of it; Jane Buck assisted the last witness in searching the prisoner’s room. His Lordship having summed up, the jury returned a verdict of Guilty. His Lordship, in the most impressive and earnest manner, sentenced the prisoner to Fourteen Years Transportation”

From the *North Hampton Mercury* of 30 May 1840;

“The under mentioned convicts have been removed from our County Goal to the York Hulk, Gosport:—William Waters, under sentence for transportation for life; John Blencowe, respectively for 14 years; ...”

Most ships converted into prison hulks were decommissioned naval vessels. John was confined for 104 days. His record paints an interesting picture: *Protestant, Can read and write, Remarks—scar on forehead, Trade—gent’s servant, Height—5.4, Age—19, Complexion—fresh,*

Head—medium size, Hair—dark brown, Whiskers—none, Visage—oval, Forehead—low, Eyebrows—dark brown, Eyes—brown, Nose—long, Mouth—small, Chin—small.

John was soon granted 18 months’ probation, a far cry from 14 years as previously sentenced. From 15 August 1842, he was stationed at Brown’s River Probation Station.

John was next recorded in October 1842 at Perth, a lovely little town about 180km (112m) north from Hobart. After a short stay, he was then assigned to the Woolmer’s Estate near Longford in November 1842. Woolmer’s was a very well established colonial rural settlement run by the Archer family from 1817. Mr. Archer was known to have great compassion for convicts, not agreeing with the system of transportation, thus treating his workers well. John served out his probation here.

Being a convict, John had to apply for permission to marry his future wife Elizabeth n^{ée} Horner. Elizabeth, a free woman who arrived in Launceston in February 1843 aged 16 with three older sisters and eight other single women obviously to help populate the colonies. John and Elizabeth married in the new Christ Church at Norfolk Plain (Longford) on 6 September 1846.

After his period of probation John, Elizabeth and their three children moved to Victoria in March 1850. Other children were born at Richmond, Moorabbin, Cheltenham and Mordialloc suggesting they moved around a lot. John worked as a pastry cook.

John Blencowe and Elizabeth Horner had 11 children including my great grandmother **Miriam Mary Barnett** (Meth “E” 437) who was born in 1854. John died aged 50 in 1870 at Mordialloc after being kicked in the abdomen by a horse, leaving Elizabeth and ten surviving children. The eldest was 22 and the youngest just 12 months. In 1877, Miriam Mary married my great grandfather, **Francis Barnett** (Meth “E” 95) who was a market gardener in the same area. He was also killed in a horse and cart accident on his way home from market in Melbourne only seven years after they were married. My grandmother, Hilda Victoria Barnett was only one month old at the time of his death.

(Source: <http://www.blencowefamilies.com/nl/234/234-07.htm>)



(above)
Miriam Barnett n^{ée} Blencowe with daughters Emily and Hilda Victoria.

(Courtesy Kevin Gibson)



(above)
The unadorned grave of John Blencowe (Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery, Meth “E” 71)