



# AROUND THE GRAVES

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NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF CHELTENHAM AND REGIONAL CEMETERIES INC.

## 75th Anniversary

Welcome to another edition of *Around the Graves*. In March 1933, the Cheltenham Memorial Park was officially opened with much fanfare. Seventy five years on, we look back at the origins of the Cheltenham Cemetery No. 2 as it was known with our special article on page two. Enjoy!

## Preserving the Past

The Friends were recently able to access the Cheltenham Cemetery files held by the Department of Human Services (DHS). Since 1890, the DHS has been government body responsible for the provisions of the *Cemeteries Act*. As the Trustee minutes and correspondence of the early years no longer exist, the material held by the DHS is a valuable resource.

One gem uncovered from the files is a plan that shows the area immediately surrounding the Pioneer Cemetery prior to 1881 when the Mordialloc railway line was constructed resulting in 3 roods (0.75 acres) of land being excised. As the only government reserve in the area, Charman Road was not the bustling shopping strip that it is today, but instead comprised land set aside for the Presbyterian and Wesleyan churches as well as part of the Market and Showyards which fronted Park Road.

And the man who was responsible for the loss of the land was the ubiquitous Tommy Bent. It is interesting that the son of a convict who rose to become Premier of Victoria on the support of his fellow market gardeners, would as Minister of Railways excise land of a burial ground that would be the final resting place for many of his supporters.

## Tour of the Memorial Park

To mark the 75th anniversary of the official opening of Cheltenham Memorial Park, the Friends are assisting the Cemetery Trust organise a general theme tour on Thursday 27 March (at 10:30am) and Sunday 30 March (at 2:30pm). One of the persons featured in the tour is this conscientious, energetic and efficient policeman (*pictured right*) who was shot dead whilst on duty outside the Crystal Palace Picture Theatre on Dandenong Road, Caulfield. The man he was alleged to have been attempting to arrest was found guilty and spent 27 years at Her Majesty's pleasure and was also the last person legally flogged in Victoria. The tragedy of the young policeman's story is that he was due to marry his fiancé in a few weeks' time.



above:  
Face of innocence.

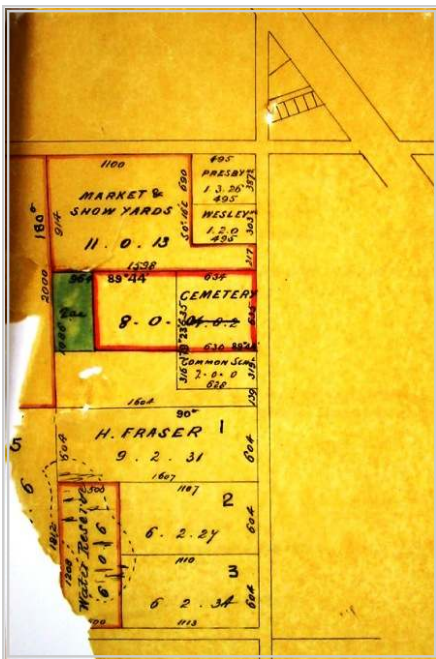
(Image courtesy of the Victoria Police Historical Society)

Come along and hear the full riveting story on this entertaining and informative tour of the Cheltenham Memorial Park. **Bookings are essential** and can be made by ringing the Bunurong Memorial Park on 03 9788 9488 or email [info@bunurong.com.au](mailto:info@bunurong.com.au).

## Members

More and more people are showing their support and joining the Friends and we now have 39 financial members. Don't forget that all members can access the Members' Area of our website where you can read articles and newspaper extracts.

[www.focrc.org/members.htm](http://www.focrc.org/members.htm)



above:  
Plan of the Pioneer Cemetery and surrounding area before the excise of land for the railway line  
(Image courtesy Department of Human Services)

# Fortune and Fortitude—The Establishment of the Cheltenham Memorial Park

In 1919, a nine acre cemetery on the fringe of the expanding Melbourne metropolis ended the year with a credit balance of just £890. In the next decade, this small cemetery in a semi-rural area would near its capacity and be faced with a bleak future of falling revenue unable to cover the rising costs of maintenance.

From 383 burials in 1926, the Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery experienced a sudden increase to 694 in 1927, 769 in 1928, then just over 700 the following year before adjusting back to the historical average of 300 to 400 burials annually. The sudden end of Brighton General Cemetery's 'golden era' left the Cheltenham Cemetery—as the nearest burial ground with plots available—with no choice but to absorb the demand of the south-east metropolis.

Nineteen twenty nine was a defining year as history would reveal. With available plots diminishing, the Trust realised the time had arrived for a long-term solution to ensure they could continue to serve the community in the decades to come. Their solution was to chance their luck and open a new cemetery.

In September 1929, a deputation consisting of members of the Trust and representatives from the local councils met with the Chief Secretary and Health Minister, Dr (Sir) Stanley Argyle (1867-1940) seeking approval to purchase 15 acres on Reserve Road near Bay Road. But less than three months after the meeting, Argyle and the McPherson Nationalist government were replaced at the November general election, and the Trustees were faced with further uncertainty. Argyle's successor was the veteran Labor stalwart Hon. William James Beckett (1870-1965) in his second term as the Public Health Minister. An associate of the tote king John Wren (1871-1953), Beckett's

political career spanned Wren's ascendancy as an entrepreneur. This time the deputation had found their man.

The site of the new cemetery was within the Sandringham municipality on the border with Moorabbin and bounded by the streets then known as Holloway (Wangara) Road, Somerset Street and Spring Street (Talinga Road). The total cost of the land comprising 21 acres 3 roods 28 perches was £4,473. The new site was actually within a housing subdivision, partially developed.

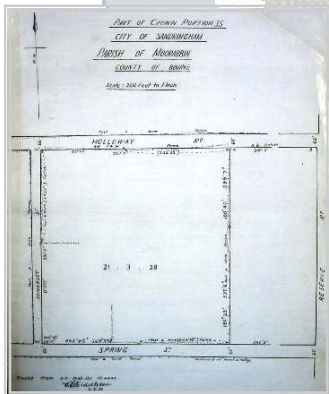
These were grim economic times locally and for the nation. Wages fell and taxes rose while unemployment in the district mirrored the wider metropolis with as many as 20 to 30 per cent of men out of work. But while the unemployed faced grim conditions, it was also an ideal time for establishing the new cemetery. The effects of deflation would mean labour was cheaper and the materials cost less. The unemployed were engaged to work on the Memorial Park.

A feature of the layout was the strong gridiron arrangement of roads and pathways contrasting with the serpentine pathways of the larger 19th century cemeteries such as Boroondara, Melbourne General and Brighton. This would be a practical and functional cemetery with each denomination allocated frontage of the main roads. By eliminating the unnecessary curved roads, there would be a more economical use of the land and thereby make it easier to lay out the gravesites.

It was a representative gathering of guests who celebrated the official opening of the Cheltenham Memorial Park on Wednesday 22 March 1933 by the Mayor of Sandringham Cr G A Brown JP.

With the interment of Mary Payne on 27 March—the 68<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first interment at the Pioneer Cemetery—there was no looking back. History would show that what the Trust achieved was no mean feat. Let's remember that this was one of Melbourne's smallest burial grounds. With just £1,764 in 1923, for the Trust to open a new cemetery a decade later costing £8,666 without the need to borrow funds was remarkable.

(Members can download a full version of the ten page article by visiting the Members' area of our website [www.focrc.org/members.htm](http://www.focrc.org/members.htm))



above:

Allotment plan permanently reserving 21.9 acres of land (Image courtesy Department of Human Services)

below:

Grave of Mary Ellen Payne, the first interment

