



# AROUND THE GRAVES

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NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF CHELTENHAM AND REGIONAL CEMETERIES INC.

## Connecting Descendants

We are pleased to launch a new service for members—"Connecting Descendants". As the name suggests, the service is about connecting members who share a link with a common ancestor. When members now submit a research request, the details are listed on our website. And when another person searches the web for the same name, they will find our website and hopefully make contact with the Friends. The Friends will then facilitate a connection whilst respecting the privacy of both parties.

Recently, the Friends connected two distant cousins of Ruth Eames *née* Whyman (1849-1919) who lies alone in an unadorned grave at the Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery. Which is remarkable considering Eames was one of nine siblings, had nine children of her own to George Bell (d 1886) and was step-mother of a further five after her second marriage to George Eames (d 1916) in 1897.

This is what a delighted Ruth of Woolbrook (NSW) had to say about her experience with submitting a research request:



above:  
Unadorned gravesite of  
Ruth Eames

*"I can recommend the grave location service supplied by the Friends of Cheltenham. It is prompt and most professional and their 'match up family enquiry' is an excellent bonus to the information and photograph of your ancestor's grave. I found a live cousin".*

Members are encouraged to check out the new service and register the details of their ancestor online. Visit [www.focrc.org/descendants.htm](http://www.focrc.org/descendants.htm).

## Remember When...?

I was one of Australia's great sopranos of the 1920s and '30s? Born on 27 June 1896 at Richmond and baptized Tertia Stella, I was dubbed 'Little Melba' by the great prima donna herself. It was an unfair comparison, though earned me a degree of prestige. Between 1926 and 1935, I sang in the USA with Hollywood stars including Roy Rogers and Mae West. I stopped singing professionally in the 1950s and died at Cheltenham on 16 January 1977. I lie buried in the Cheltenham Memorial Park. Who Am I?



(Image courtesy of Herald & Weekly Times Portrait Collection, State Library of Victoria)

(Log on to the Members' Area of our website to see the answer—[www.focrc.org/members.htm](http://www.focrc.org/members.htm))

## Did you know?

The first grave to be re-opened took place 168 burials and 255 days after the opening of the Cheltenham Memorial Park. Emma Guest, 78, of Middle Brighton was buried on 7 December 1933 joining her husband George Mottram Guest, 89, who was interred in CofE "117" 6 on 16 August. In contrast, the first grave to be re-opened at the Pioneer Cemetery occurred 632 days after the first interment when Edward Brooks, 63, was laid to rest in CofE "E" 190 with four-year-old Edward John Brooks, who was just the fifth interment to take place at the historic Cemetery. (Source: *Burial Register of the Cheltenham cemeteries*)

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# Ray Neville: Budding Aviator

First-Constable William Neville (1884-1960) was competing with other members of the Victoria Police Force in the King's Prize at the Williamstown Rifle Range. As he was walking off the butts, he was handed a telegram every parent who cradled an offspring in their hearts lived in dread of receiving. His son Ray was dead ending a triple friendship of bosom buddies who all died in similar accidents in a space of 16 months.

Gerrard Raymond Neville was the eldest of five sons, born at Bungaree near Ballarat in 1909, the same year William married Mary Magdalene *née* Prendegast (1881-1965). Siblings William (b 1910), Edward (Ted) (1911-98), Reginald (1913-2001) and Francis (b 1918) made up the rest of the family.

Ray Neville's great love was to fly amongst the heavens like those idols of the air, Hinkler and Kingsford-Smith who pushed the boundaries of aviation with their record breaking flights. Neville was your archetypical aviator. His pin-up looks concealed a virtue that separates the immortals from men—he did not know fear. Indeed, if he lived another ten years, Neville would have surely earned a DFC over the skies of Europe during WWII.

Neville was employed as a mechanic with Matthews Aviation Company based at Essendon aerodrome. He was highly popular with staff and a competent mechanic. But as much as he enjoyed his job, he wanted to be a commercial pilot.

Neville was not the only mechanic keen to obtain his commercial pilot's licence. Frederick William Ward (formerly Hammond), 24, needed to clock another 20 hours in the sky to qualify for

his 'B' Commercial Licence. Ward had clocked many hours in his own machine—the Baby Avro flown by none other than Bert Hinkler on his historic flight from Croydon (London) to Turin (Italy) in May 1920. Formerly with the RAAF (1925-28) and Western Australia Airways Ltd, he had been with Matthews Aviation for just six weeks. In 1928, Ward spent a period in New Guinea where he contracted malaria that caused bouts of dizziness. On one occasion in May 1929, he collapsed during lunch. "These turns catch me now and again," he told his lunch companion Henry Ellis. And then on the day of Neville's death, fellow workers noticed that Ward was very pale and was perspiring excessively even though it was a cool day. But Matthews and his co-director Keith Gardiner had no reason to suspect Ward was in indifferent health as it was never brought to their attention. Safety and "she'll be right, mate" had the same meaning.

After Gardiner took the company's new de Havilland Gypsy Moth for a test flight, he left it ticking over on his return to the hangar. The next minute, Ward and Neville downed their tools and rushed to the plane. "I've not been up for three weeks and I'm not going to miss this chance for anything," one of them said.

**Come along and join us on our newest tour—"The Tragic '30s: Decade of Adventure" on Sunday 21 June 2009 at 2:00pm at the Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery (Charman Road) and find out how Ray Neville died. Cost is \$5.00 (\$10.00 for non-members) and includes tour guide and refreshments. Bookings essential. Use our on-line tour booking form [www.focrc.org/tours.htm](http://www.focrc.org/tours.htm) or (03) 5420 7671.**



above:  
The downed Gypsy Moth VH-UNL in which Ray Neville was killed. George Matthews and Keith Gardiner are on the far left

(Courtesy Newspaper Collection, State Library of Victoria)



above:  
A baby-face Ray Neville

(Courtesy Newspaper Collection, State Library of Victoria)

The Friends are proud to be inaugural members of the Australian Federation of Cemetery Friends Inc. [www.afocf.org](http://www.afocf.org)