



AROUND THE GRAVES

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NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF CHELTENHAM AND REGIONAL CEMETERIES INC.

Caulfield Railway Disaster Biographical Register

On 26 May 1926, the first fatal accident involving the loss of life occurred on Melbourne's electrified railway network. Yet eight decades on, little has been written about the Caulfield Railway Disaster. In this issue of *Around the Graves*, we look at the work that the Friends have undertaken to commemorate the event. It is just another example of the work we do—*research, restore, remember*.

Officially, 153 cases of injuries were reported to the Railway Department. But our research shows that as many as 173 were injured. The Friends have put together a 37,000 word biographical register featuring those associated with the tragedy. The register aims to remember not only the lives that were lost and those who were injured but also their families, the rescuers and the medical personnel who were affected. The register can be downloaded from the Members' Area of our website by all financial members.

www.focrc.org/members.htm

Commemorative Service

On Sunday 25 May, a commemorative service will be held at the Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery (Charman Road) where all three victims lie interred. The service

will be a gathering of local historical societies, organisations and individuals who have all generously assisted the Friends. One of those killed was 17-year-old George Beames from Pt Nepean Road, Carrum. Jagged beams from the telescoped carriage jammed Beames between the metal and wooden uprights and flung him back to the seat. He was killed instantly. His book was still on his lap and he slouched slightly over as if he was still reading. Every time a girl looked at Beames, she screamed in horror as he turned as white as death.



above:
Elsie Dean who is
featured in the
biographical register

(Newspaper
Collection, State
Library of Victoria)

A Project of Partnerships

Though the disaster occurred at Caulfield, it affected such a large number of persons residing around south-east Melbourne. In a project involving partnerships with local historical societies and organisations from the south-east, the Friends obtained grants and donations to fund the research and commemorative service. In return, we provided a copy of all material collated. The Friends acknowledge the assistance of Arrow Bronze, Hihett Community Bank, The Cheltenham and Regional Cemetery Trust, City of Kingston and Lodge Bros as well as the historical societies of Chelsea, Mordialloc, Moorabbin and Glen Eira.



Bendigo Bank
Hihett Community Bank

The Friends gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Hihett Community Bank. The Hihett Community Bank works hard on behalf of the Hihett Community to ensure all customers receive access to a full array of banking products at competitive interest rates and friendly, professional and personalised service. The Bank is located at 322-324 Hihett Road, Hihett Vic 3190. Ph: 03 9555 6055.

26-5-26: Carnage and Courage at Caulfield

The electrification of the metropolitan railway network between 1919 and 1923 saw the number of passengers carried increase from 97 million in 1918 to 156 million in 1925 when the last of the all-steam trains were phased out. Indeed, electrification had contributed to the rapid expansion of the population in the Bayside area, a point not lost on the Cheltenham Cemetery Trust when they successfully argued the need for a new burial ground in the late 1920s. To the delight of the public, travelling in the new Tait cars was clean, comfortable and convenient. The 'red rattlers' as they were more affectionately known, while steeped in romance and reminiscences were not renowned for their robustness.

Unlike the other three platforms at the Caulfield Railway Station, a train travelling along the local line had an obscured view of platform 4 due to an idiosyncratic feature on the up side. The location of

signal box 'A' stood 70 feet from the end of the platform where there was a sharp bend in the track leading to platform 4. Unable to see the presence of any traffic until

after passing the home signal, the driver of an approaching train had to rely solely on semaphore (post) 1 giving the all-clear to proceed. With an obscured view and no trip system in place, Fate could not ask for a more ideal location to rear its ugly head.

"The train has passed the stick!", cried George Wright from

the signal box as the 6.02 pm Oakleigh-down train passed the home signal. Wright ran to the other end of the signal box with the red emergency stop light to warn the driver. But it was all in vain. The red lights of the Carrum train standing at platform 4 were in full view and a crash was inevitable within seconds.

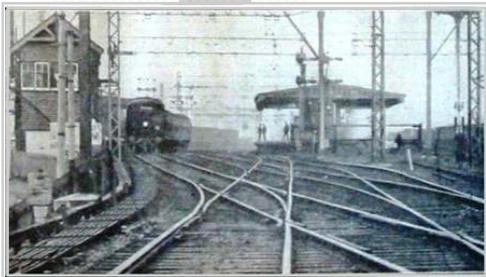
When the crash came, it was as swift as it was sudden with appalling results. The frame and body of the trailer forced the motorvan to rise in the air more than a metre as the compartments crumbled like a concertina into a mass of mangled wreckage, shattering glass and splitting woodwork. When the pantographs went out, the carriages were sent into sudden darkness as the trapped and helpless passengers tried desperately to free themselves.

The luckiest person to escape the impact was the driver of the Oakleigh train, William Stevenson Milvain. Structurally, the cabin of the front motorvan withstood the shock and suffered only minor damage, and Milvain was not badly hurt, but he was flung against the side of the cabin, and suffered severely from shock. He may have had a lucky escape, but the worst was yet to come. Life would never be the same for the veteran with an impeccable 13-year record as an engine driver.

Many worried family members became anxious when their loved ones failed to return. For the McKenzie family, they first heard about the tragedy in the most dramatic circumstances. While in Chelsea to attend a dance where Albert McKenzie was to be the Master of Ceremonies, a woman ran into the street calling out that there had been a terrible railway accident. They all thought she was mad.

The Caulfield Railway disaster remains to this day the greatest single event to affect so many lives from Melbourne's south-east. And it should never have happened. For such a simple error to have caused such widespread carnage shows that the Caulfield signalling system was inadequately protected.

(Members can download the full version of the 12,200 word article by visiting the Members' area of our website www.focrc.org/members.htm)



above:

Caulfield Railway Station showing signal box 'A'. A train can be seen at platform 4

below:

The telescoped carriages, showing the first-class trailer on the left and the second-class motorvan

(Newspaper Collection, State Library of Victoria)

