



AROUND THE GRAVES

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NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF CHELTENHAM AND REGIONAL CEMETERIES INC.

In this special issue of *Around the Graves* we look at some of the tragic deaths that occurred in Port Phillip Bay.

Gordon Blair...

Fifteen-year-old **Gordon William Blair (Pioneer Cemetery, CofE "D" 18B)** of 41 Bluff Road, Black Rock was with two friends at the Half Moon Bay pier in December 1930 when they saw a boy in the water who appeared in difficulty.

The three brave boys dived into the water, but just 12 yards out, Blair was never seen again, though one of the boys, Fred May would later tell the inquest that two girls on the pier told him (May) afterwards that they thought they saw Blair go ashore.



above:
Gravesite of Gordon Blair
Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery
(CofE "D" 18B)

On hearing the news, **Maurice Baker (Memorial Park, RC "236" 8)** of 7 Iona Street took charge of a boat and after 15 minutes, managed to locate Blair's body eight feet under water using grappling irons. His body was brought back to the lifesaving club where Dr Grice and members of the club applied resuscitation unsuccessfully for 2.5 hours.

The coroner found Blair died from asphyxia from accidental drowning.

(Source: *The Argus* 26 Dec 1930 p3; PROV VPRS 24/P/0000 Unit 001187 1930/1405)

Frank Dalterio...

In July 1923, while on his way from Sandringham to Mornington with three other fellow Italian fisherman, **Francesco (Frank) Dalterio (Memorial Park, Lawn "A1" Row E 14)** noticed the stern of a fishing boat sticking up from the surface of the water off Black Rock. It was a capsized yacht with the sail still intact. After being righted a

description was telephoned to the Williamstown water police and it was found to be owned by a group from Altona who had disappeared the previous Sunday.

Fishermen who examined the boat noted that the sail was tied fast and attributed this to the capsizing of the vessel from a gust of wind that caused the boat to "turn turtle".

The missing yachtsmen were not located.

(Source: *The Argus* 20 July 1923 p11)

Mystery Girl...

The Bay claimed its share of unidentified victims some who were buried in the original Stranger's Ground in the Pioneer Cemetery (now CofE Section "S"). In February 1897, Melbourne was transfixed to the identity of an unfortunate girl who was washed ashore at Mentone near the old baths.

The ravages of the ocean rendered the body in a state of disfigurement that **Dr. George Scantlebury (Pioneer Cemetery, CofE "45" 78)** was unable to determine the exact cause of death. In describing the body, Dr. Scantlebury stated the woman was not older than 30 years, of good figure and well-nourished. She had never been a mother, but it was impossible to say whether she was married. The one remaining foot was encased by a neat boot which indicated that the owner had not done heavy, laborious work.

The body was eventually identified as being a domestic servant named Martha Woodgate, 22. Evidence was heard from Woodgate's boyfriend David Copeland, railway porter at Brighton Beach station that Woodgate was pregnant, but Copeland denied any improper relations.

(Source: *The Argus* 26 Feb 1897 p3; *Launceston Examiner* 26 Feb 1897 p6; *Oakleigh Leader* 27 Feb 1897 p2)

Lorenzo Mellon...

In the 1880s when the pleasures of the Bay were increasingly enjoyed by the masses, death by drowning was an inevitable consequence.

Lorenzo Mellon (Pioneer Cemetery, CofE "E" 88) was a young architect who arrived on the *Iberia* on 1 March 1888, though one newspaper report stated he had only been in Melbourne for four or five days. A friend of his family back in Ireland, Dr Johnson Williams of East Melbourne arranged a picnic for a party of friends at Beaumaris Park. A boat was borrowed and they had a splendid sail before bad weather threatened. The boat's owner lived in Mentone and was anxious to return so was joined by his grandson, Williams jnr and Mellon on the return trip. Just ten minutes after the party launched, the weather changed and a roaring squall approached rapidly causing the boat to overturn. In spite of the conditions, a rescue party led by Dr Williams—which nearly drowned themselves—reached the capsized boat, but Mellon had vanished having gone down with the boat. His body was eventually washed ashore about half-an-hour later.

Two young men, brothers Thomas and Edward Hepburn were presented with a gold anchor pin set and pearls in recognition of the "prompt and manly action in facing danger" by rendering assistance to the helpless party.

(Source: *The Argus* 12 Nov 1888 p8; *Kerang Times and Swan Hill Gazette* 13 Nov 1888 p4)

Francis Luttgens...

The death of **Francis George Luttgens (Pioneer Cemetery, CofE "4" 3)** at the Mordialloc pier was a timely reminder that experience is no match for the unconquerable, unforgivable sea.

Luttgens, a keen fisherman with 25 years' experience was returning home on 11 January 1923 from a two day boat-camping trip across the Bay at Werribee with a friend, retired grocer Charles James of Park St, Mordialloc. Suddenly the weather began to change, and they decided to return for Mordialloc but not before the sea unleashed one of its unforgiving moods—heavy waves with strong, southerly gusts. James would tell the inquest that;

"Everything went fairly well until we got near Mordialloc Pier and I said 'What about anchoring out?' He said 'We will have one shot! We went in, Luttgens was working the boat and we shot between the pier and struck it. We backed out and Luttgens said to me, 'Charlie look after

[the] engine and shut her off when I drop the anchor. As soon as he dropped it, I stopped the engine and when I looked up he was gone. I got a lifebuoy but the seas caught me, and I could not throw it. Luttgens was swimming toward the pier. I got the boat going to try to pick him up. I saw a buoy thrown to him it went about 18 inches from him [but] he did not try to grasp it. I think a big wave struck him against the pier and made him unconscious."

Luttgens' body was located two hours later on rocks about a mile away.

(Source: PROV VPRS 24/P/0000 Unit 001031 1923/96)

Leslie Organ...

William Edwin Organ (Pioneer Cemetery, CofC "A" 63) was a long-serving cemetery sexton to the Cheltenham Trust (1893-1928) who lived in Coape St, Cheltenham.

In January 1898, William's two sons, Albert and **Leslie (CofC "A" 63)** left home to go to the beach at Mentone. For some minutes, they bathed merrily in the surf, when Leslie was said to have stepped in a hole, and throwing up his arms, sank from view. Albert tried to rescue his brother, but unable to swim and with the water rising to his mouth, he retreated. The newspapers of the day were incredulous that Leslie could drown in two feet of water while in full view of beachgoers—"Lives are frequently lost solely by reason of persons who might save them losing all presence of mind." Organ's funeral is covered in great detail by **Fairlie Taylor (CofC "A" 21)** who wrote "As soon as the funeral service was over, I rushed from the cemetery and ran all the way home...They put Les into the great big hole and all the tuberose went in with him."

(Source: *The Caulfield and Elsternwick Leader* 15 Jan 1898 p2; *The Argus* 10 Jan 1898 p6; Taylor, F., "Bid Time Return" p64)



above:
Headstone inscription of Francis Luttgens, Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery (CofE "4" 3)

I realise, that at the time of your greatest loss, you need the understanding of an experienced, empathetic and honest celebrant. Utilising my writing skills, let me create a compassionate service, tailored to suit your needs, to farewell and honour your beloved in a dignified manner. Contact Jenny Tacken www.jennyfuneralcelebrant.com.au or phone 0430 181 820.



Jenny Tacken 