



# AROUND THE GRAVES

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NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF CHELTENHAM AND REGIONAL CEMETERIES INC.

## The Tragic '20s

The Friends are currently putting together a new tour of the Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery for Law Week 2009 to be held on Sunday 17 May at 11:00am. Titled "The Tragic '20s" the tour features stories of local residents from Benteigh, Moorabbin, Sandringham, Cheltenham, Mentone, Mordialloc, Chelsea and Bonbeach who died in tragic circumstances during the 1920s.



above:

Killed by a bottle thrown from a passing train, one of the subjects of "The Tragic '20s" tour

Benteigh is represented by the death of a market gardener from Tucker Road. While leaving home to drive his lorry to the Queen Victoria market, he was involved in a fatal collision on Pt Nepean Road. His wife sued the driver and was awarded £850 in damages.

Moorabbin includes the tragic story of a family from Small Road with five children. While in town shopping on

Christmas Eve, the mother left the care of the children to the eldest aged 13. On returning home, ten-year-old Jack had been shot dead by his elder brother. The brother was found a few days later at Cockatoo having won third place in race for school children.

At Sandringham, a retired farmer and his wife residing in Sims Street had the heartbreak of losing their 20-year-old son in a shooting accident at Drysdale near Geelong. The following day, the father died while brooding on his loss.

Buried two graves down is the family of the local blacksmith from Cheltenham. Their only son, ten-year-old Albert was electrocuted trying to mend a leaking spouting. His father never recovered from his son's death. His marriage failed and he took solace in the bottle.

And finally down at Bonbeach lived a commercial traveller and his family on Shenfield Avenue. Their 18-year-old daughter was 'murdered', or rather the victim of an illegal abortion gone wrong.

## Chef of the Royal Train

Born in Beechworth, Reuben Gamel (c1878-1927) enlisted in the Great War on 5 May 1915 and served with the 11th Battery, 4th Field Artillery Brigade (1915-17). His place of residence is listed as Carew Street, Sandringham and at the time he was married with four children. Wounded in battle with a gunshot wound to his right-shoulder on 3 November 1916, after recovering, he was attached to the No. 1 Command Depot of the 11th Battalion but the following year was demobilised due to his injury and he returned to Australia. Gamel was the head chef of the Victorian Railways refreshment services. As his brief obituary noted;



above:

The Duke and Duchess of York on the Royal Train, 1927

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*"Mr. Gamel supervised the cooking on the Royal train between Melbourne and Adelaide. That journey, however, proved too great a strain and shortly after the arrival of the train at Adelaide on April 30 he was taken to hospital. He died a week later."*

This was the Royal Visit of the Duke and Duchess of York, later King George VI (1895-1952), parents of Queen Elizabeth II. Gamel's body was taken back to Victoria and he was laid to rest in the Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery (CofE "96" 9). Amongst the wreaths was one from the Duke and Duchess. His headstone reads:

*"6603 Driver / Reuben Gamel / 11th Bty. 4th F.A.B. / 7th May 1927. / at rest. / H: In loving memory of / our dear mother / Violet Rose Gamel / died 16th April 1966. / a courageous spirit / and a gallant heart. / at rest."*

(Source: *The Argus* 10 May 1927 p21)

# The Tenacious Tom Trebilco

The market gardeners who worked the land around the Cheltenham district are the unheralded fathers of Melbourne whose legacy has been largely ignored. They put family over fame, hard work over high life which meant that beyond the district, few became champion sportsmen. Except one who possessed a freakish natural talent—the tenacious Tom Trebilco (1897-1953) who lies interred at the Cheltenham Memorial Park.

Out in the back-blocks of Keysborough lived the Trebilcos, a well-respected pioneer market gardening family. William John Trebilco and his wife Sarah *née* Anderson (c1863-1941) worked the land in Perry Road and had a large brood of ten children spanning both sides of Federation. By dint of good timing, William and Sarah were spared the heartbreak of losing their sons on the killing fields of Europe – by the time Jack and Tom were old enough to enlist, the Great War was nearing its bloody end.

It was not long after his return from the war that Tom took up a 55-acre repatriation farm on Stanley Road, Keysborough which he spent the rest of his life working single-handedly. The land made Trebilco. Strong as a lion and as game as Ned Kelly, he possessed boundless determination and tenacity with a never-say-die attitude. He was in every way a born athlete, a runner with an enormous stride who could hold onto any pace and then unleash a final burst at the finish. At the Victorian Championships held at Olympic Park two weeks after joining the Melbourne Harriers, untrained and untaught, Tom ran a gallant third against terrific odds in both the half-mile and mile races, a feat unheard of around the nation. A few months later, he decided to turn professional, upset by “*the attitude adopted by certain officials of the VAAA*” who withheld his trophy. Half an hour after winning the prized Stawell Mile handicap, whether it was by design or the euphoria of Tom’s victory, his coach Ned Richardson put out a challenge and he had the World Professional Mile champion in his sights, the great Charlie Bergmeier (1887-1964). These victories and the long period of training at the Aspendale racecourse had instilled a strong bond between coach and pupil.

Like Trebilco, Bergie was a son of the soil and a powerful runner with a style described as poetry in motion in marked contrast with Trebilco’s. His success owed much to his lithe body and forceful personality, a characteristic of many out-and-out champions since time immemorial. In

Tom Trebilco, Bergmeier had found a worthy opponent and the Melbourne public were about to witness a clash of youth and virility against style and experience.

It would be many more months and five meetings between the parties before the terms of the clash were decided. The newspaper *The Sporting Globe* with the promoter Jim du Frocq finalised arrangements with a purse of £250 which included side bets of £100 from each runner, a championship sash and a gold medal. Bergmeier at 35 years, could ill afford to play a waiting game, the youthful young challenger was improving under Richardson with every training session. Little did Bergmeier know that during trials at Aspendale, Trebilco clocked one-mile in four minutes ten seconds, a time two seconds better than the world record and good enough to win gold in the mile event at the first four British Empire (Commonwealth) Games.

The big day arrived and shortly after 7 o’clock there was a continual stream of spectators. The cyclists were the attraction, but the *pièce de résistance* was the Trebilco-Bergmeier contest scheduled for 9.15pm. Five minutes before the race, the runners appeared on the track before an estimated crowd of 10,000-15,000. Wearing scarlet silk jersey and knickers, Bergie’s imposing athletic figure was the first to appear and like a champion running his final race, he trotted lightly around the track lapping up the adulation. Trebilco on the other hand, was content with a 50 yard jog.

Addressing the runners, Victorian Athletic League official, Jack Schafe asked both men to give the other a fair go before tossing the coin. It was won by Trebilco who selected the inside position. Then with the loud cry of “get set” and the sounding of the pistol from Jack Pemberton, the runners were sent off to an excellent start.

Members can find out who won the race by reading the full 3,000 word article from the Members’ area of our website:

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



above:  
A well tanned Tom Trebilco in running gear