

Royal Western Australian Historical Society's
Annual Pioneers Memorial Service
on Sunday 2nd June 1968 at St Bartholomews Chapel, East Perth Cemeteries,

Citation by Senator Malcolm Scott, Minister for Customs and Excise.

It was with great pleasure that I accepted the invitation of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society, and the Western Australian Council of Churches to speak today at the Annual Pioneers Memorial Service.

This is the first time I have had the opportunity of attending the Service, although I have, of course, been aware of the tremendous efforts made by the Society to record and commemorate the people who are part of our State's history.

I am greatly impressed by the beautiful setting of today's service. This cemetery is itself almost a book of history of Western Australia; the authorities are to be congratulated on the way the lawns and headstones are cared for and preserved.

When this cemetery was first laid out the site was far from the bustle of the two lusty infants - Fremantle and Perth. I doubt that our forebears ever imagined that the city would encroach upon, this area set aside for burials.

Yet I think the early settlers would be proud to know the result of this dedicated work lies around us today. I am reminded of the inscription on Sir Christopher Wren's tomb in St. Paul's Cathedral - "If you would see his monument, look around". How well we can adapt that epitaph for our pioneer ancestors - not only in Western Australia, but across our entire nation.

"If you would seek their monument, look around". No pioneer could wish for a better monument than the developing, thriving State of Western Australia. Minerals, oil, wheat and other primary products pour forth from this State to bring prosperity to its people. A space tracking station and satellite communication station have been established on our northern coast.

The tracking station is playing a major role in the fantastic project to put men on the moon and to return them safely. A major defence establishment has been built on our North Cape. The State is surging forward at an incredible pace.

Water has been harnessed to bring fertility to areas like the Kimberley's and crops are now grown which would have been unthinkable even a few years ago. A network of roads has been laid down to carry produce to the ports and markets. Even today new railways are being laid to bring the mountains of metal ore to the ships which will take them to overseas buyers.

Jet aircraft have reduced vast distances to a matter of hours and the State is served by a comprehensive series of air services.

Western Australia is thriving not only in its industry, mining, primary production and communications, but also in education and culture. The University is one of the foremost in Australia and our cultural festivals are the envy of other States. Our population is enriched each year by a steady flow of migrants who settle easily in the West to enjoy our free, democratic and pleasant way of life.

The Pioneers who founded this State, and who worked so valiantly to make sure that the foundations were firm, came from every walk of life. They were explorers, prospectors, farmers, teachers, lawyers, churchmen, simple labourers, and administrators.

Many of them were buried in this cemetery. From 1830 to 1890 about 10,000 men and women were brought here – and sometimes, as we are pathetically reminded by the headstones, their young children. The first burials to be recorded was that of John Mitchell, aged 22 soldier of the 63rd Regiment.

I thought this was particularly interesting, because I discovered that it was men of the 63rd Regiment who built the first church in the settlement of Perth. John Mitchell doubtless worked on that church. In doing so he would have been working for another pioneer buried here - John Burdett Wittenoom, first Colonial Chaplain in Western Australia. His story exemplifies the single-minded efforts of these early pioneers.

Wittenoom was a widower. He arrived in Fremantle in 1830 at the age of 41 with his mother, four sons and a sister. For six years, single-handed, he ministered to a scattered parish, which included settlements at Perth, Fremantle, Guildford, Canning and Albany. His stipend was £250 a year with an extra 2/6d for his horses' keep. In 1838 he supervised a school in Perth. He was a member of the first Education Committee convened in Perth in 1847 and he was chairman of the committee for a number of years. He was a leader in social and cultural matters. He was the Secretary of the Children's Friendly Society and the Juvenile Immigration Society. His grandson, Sir Edward Wittenoom, gave his name to the famous Gorge.

This man, John Wittenoom, is typical of our pioneers: dedicated, selfless, and determined. It is fitting that he should take his place among the pioneers who lie around us today and that a plaque to his memory should be placed - as it was, in 1857, two years after his death - in St. George's Cathedral, Perth.

There are many others who are interred in the East Perth Cemetery and to whom homage is due.

For example, John Septimus Roe, first Surveyor-General of Western Australia, who arrived at the mouth of the Swan River in the "Parmelia" with Captain James Stirling in 1829. It was he who recommended the sites for Fremantle and Perth. A patient and thorough explorer, he discovered coal on the Fitzgerald River and in the mouth of the Phillips; he was largely responsible for the setting aside of King's Park as a permanent reserve. Since 1955, his logbook, diaries and letters have formed a fascinating part of the Perth Library Collection. He was buried in this cemetery, in 1878.

Sir Andrew Clarke, a fine soldier and administrator, the only Governor of Western Australia to die in office, lies buried here; so does George Leake, and his brother Sir Luke Leake, who were lawyers and administrators; also Sir Archibald Burt, the Colony's first Chief Justice, whose daughter married George Leake's son George, Premier of W.A. in 1901.

There are many others, both famous and humble, who not only gave their working lives to the State, but who also established great families and traditions to carry on their work and their aspirations. I am pleased that descendants of our pioneers are present at this service.

Today we celebrate the 139th anniversary of the foundation of Western Australia; we gather here to remember the old pioneers of the State. I should like to couple with this remembrance

a tribute to the modern pioneers - the geologists, the scientists, the engineers, the economists and the managers, who, in their own fields are the 20th century pioneers of Western Australia.

What the next 139 years hold for us no one can tell; but I believe that we shall continue to see miracles of development and progress. I believe, too, that our successors will have cause to be as proud of today's pioneers, of today's West Australians, as we are of those of a century ago.

As a people, Australians have never been slavish to the past. We have made it a virtue to be of the present, to avoid sentimental reminders of what has gone before. As a result, for many years, documents and records were tossed aside as of no account and it is often exceedingly difficult to piece together our detailed history. We have always known the broad grand story of Australia and her development, but the day-to-day details of people's lives, of their hopes, their worries and their domestic problems, have been largely lost because of the attitude that only today matters.

This is a great pity. I believe that if we had followed the magpie instinct of the Europeans we should have a far more engrossing story to tell of our past. The hoarded records of our ancestors would have made for rich and rewarding study.

As it is, we have much for which to thank the various State historical societies. The Royal West Australian Historical Society does wonderful work in patiently researching our history and piecing together those social and domestic patterns which go to make up a nation.

It is thanks to the Society, and to the Council of Churches, that we gather together here once every year to honour our pioneers.

But it is a small thing to devote but a part of one Sunday afternoon a year to remembering the past. As you leave today, I ask you always to give a thought for the pioneers - as you drive home through the city's attractive suburbs, as you go to work each day and as you travel about the State on holiday or on business.

Remember as you go that it was the pioneers we commemorate today who blazed the trail and made all this possible for us.

We can look around now, and see the monuments to the pioneers of long ago - not just the graves and the headstone, for these are but symbols. What we see are our cities and industries, and the peaceful bustle and beauty of our modern State which is building so excitingly on the foundations laid by those who went before.