

Royal Western Australian Historical Society's
Annual Pioneers Memorial Service
on Sunday 9th June 1991 at St Bartholomews Chapel, East Perth Cemeteries,

Commemorating Alfred Carson – an Exceedingly Clever and Learned Man

Citation by Rica Ericson, read by Barry Carson

Alfred Carson was born in about 1810, and arrived at the Swan River Colony on 2 June 1831 as a member of the crew of the *Sterling*. This vessel had been chartered by Marshall McDermott who, with his supercargo George Cheyne, planned to settle in the colony. The *Sterling* sailed from Scotland, bound first for Sweden, where it took on board prefabricated houses, stores and animals.¹ Cheyne also engaged a Swedish carpenter and a servant woman, while McDermott arranged for some of his crew to be his labourers when they arrived in the colony.

With Scottish frugality, while in Sweden McDermott also purchased the crew's provisions for the voyage. This later became a matter for contention with the sailors, because Swedish weights were equivalent to only three-quarters of English weights, and the crew's rations therefore were lighter than those usually offered to British sailors.

On arrival at Fremantle, Cheyne severed his connection with McDermott and proceeded to occupy land on the south coast, to the east of Albany, where he established a settlement strongly reminiscent of a Scottish sea coast, with whitewashed cottages snugly nestled into a green clearing. McDermott went in search of land in the Swan district, leaving his crew to guard the stores which were landed on the beach.

The crew sought redress for the poor food and accommodation they suffered during the voyage. Five of them signed a petition drawn up by the steward, and addressed to His Excellency the Governor, begging leave to inform him 'of the usage we have had on board the ship *Sterling* since we embarked January 5th, on an allowance of 6 lbs Swedish bread per week, coarse mouldy and full of maggots ... 3 lbs of Beef, 2 lbs of Pork per week, both Swedish and poor Thin flabby stuff... (a quarter of it cut away as bone and waste), $\frac{1}{2}$ lb of Butter, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb of Sugar and 2ozs Tea per week, all Swedish weight $11\frac{1}{2}$ ozs to the lb; Peas and Pearl Barley not fit for anything, old, mouldy and full of maggots, all clotted together; not a single potato, nor fresh mess, neither at sea nor in Harbour. No allowance of spirits except once.'²

The indentures stated that they should have 'proper and sufficient' rations. Failure to provide them incurred a payment to some of them of £200 and to others £100, which could be claimed by action of debt. The signatories were Thomas Harrington, Isaac Nadon, Alfred Carson, Robert Nyon and John Predy, the last signing with a cross. Isaac Nadon added a postscript: 'I have been a Steward on several Respectable Vessels, but I never experienced such usage—2 plates, 2 knives and 2 forks to 9 people, and a Spitoon to eat out of... [and made] to sit down under the steerage ladder to eat.'

The immediate outcome of this petition is not known but in the 1832 Census these disgruntled sailors were listed among McDermott's employees, on a property known as 'Ashby' at Middle Swan. Alfred Carson gave his age as twenty-three years, born at Devon and unmarried. Later information suggests that he spent much of his life in Scotland. He remained at Ashby, at least until January 1835, when he married Ann Hunt, an illiterate servant woman who worked for J. S. Harris, the

proprietor of a neighbouring grant named 'Strelley'. However, by 1836 Carson was working at Perth as one of a group of artisans who tendered successfully for the building of the Public Offices.³ He was then employed by W. L. Brockman of 'Herne Hill', the leading landowner in the Upper Swan district. The 1837 Census listed Alfred and Ann Carson at Herne Hill, along with two sons, George, who was born in 1835, and Alfred, who was born in 1837 but was destined to die a year later.

By this time Alfred Carson had a reputation as an engineer (or mechanic) and assisted William Cruse, an illiterate miller, to build a water mill in 1837 at 'Ellensbrook' in the Upper Swan district.⁴ Carson did not own land and his family depended upon his employer for accommodation but he appears to have rented a cottage at 'Albion Town' about this time. Three of the Carson children were born there, Frances in 1839, Thomas in 1842 and Mary Ann in 1843.

Carson was a skilful blacksmith and was in demand to make or mend the simple farm implements in use in the early days. In April 1841 he advertised for an apprentice to be taught the trade of millwright and wheelwright, giving his address as 'Herne Hill'.⁵ To facilitate his work at the forge, he improvised a new kind of forge blower using a centrifugal blast. Having an inventive turn of mind, in 1842 he devised a plough which was better suited for rough colonial conditions. After a successful demonstration at a ploughing match, he was awarded a silver medal in 1842 at the Guildford Agricultural Show, as reported in the *Inquirer* of 4 October. Thus encouraged he turned his attention to other farm implements. Harvesting with a scythe or sickle was costly in time and labour. Late in 1842 news came from South Australia of the invention of a horse-powered reaper. Carson's attention was then turned towards making one of his own. According to the *Inquirer* of 3 January 1843, 'One of our most enterprising settlers in conjunction with Mr Carson has already planned a reaping machine'. The public use of the title 'Mr' must have been gratifying to Carson, for it represented a rise in social status above that of a labourer or servant. But he was dependent upon constant employment if his inventions were to come to fruition. He was fortunate to come under the patronage of Samuel Moore of 'Oakover', a very progressive and generous settler in the Middle Swan district.

In 1845 Moore leased the Guildford steam mill, the chequered career of which has already been researched by W. J. de Burgh.⁶ Samuel Moore had a horse-powered mill at Oakover before the steam mill was transferred from Perth to Guildford in 1843. He had been one of the most regular customers of the Mt Eliza steam mill at Perth. After transferring the mill to Guildford the new owners suffered financial losses. When Moore leased it in 1845, he employed the former miller and engineer John Smith to operate the concern as a saw mill and flour mill. New boilers were designed and made by one Powell to replace the original boilers which were always breaking down. In 1845 the boilers burst twice, the wooden spindles broke and the driving cords proved to be too weak.⁷ Moore's troubles were multiplied when arsonists tried twice to burn the mill.

The use of steam power had long exercised Alfred Carson's brain. He was an avid reader, especially of anything relating to science. He knew the force of water power, having observed the strong spiral flow of water when it was directed through a narrow hole, such as a plug hole in a tub of water. He may have read of the construction in 130 BC of a little toy, a spherical boiler rotated at high speed on trunions by two reaction arms opposite each other'. He may also have known of the adaptation of this idea in the 18th century, as well as subsequent improvements in the 19th century by Whitelaw.⁸

The repeated failures of the Guildford steam mill obliged Moore to employ ten men on repairs, including an American engineer named John Byrne. Another was Alfred Carson, whose forge blower, the most valued of his inventions, was capable of creating a blast strong enough for casting brass and iron. Moore gave Carson the facilities for building an engine using centrifugal force. It has been said that Moore was interested in helping Carson to patent his inventions, but was informed that the Colonial Government had no power to grant letters of patent, so these moves were deferred temporarily. Carson was a slow, deliberate worker, too engrossed in making his invention to be involved in patents at this time.

John Byrne, who took charge of the repairs to the steam mill, was a bustling, fast-working mechanic. Moore's bookkeeper, William Wade, wrote in his 'Reminiscences' an interesting account of Alfred Carson at work.

Carson disclosed to Mr Moore some idea he had formed of the application of steam to machinery Two circular sheets of boilerplate 3 to 4 feet in diameter [were] to be united by a hoop of the same, some inches wide and strongly riveted together at the rims ... The inside divided into many sections by curving separations, or compartments, and all made steam tight. Steam to be admitted by an aperture to the cylinder, causing it to revolve at incalculable speed, horizontally, producing a power applicable to many uses on farms and universally.

Wade continued:

He received 'carte blanche' and went to work (or I might say, to play). The weeks and weeks he shaped and hammered and filed and riveted I cannot say, but he made the thing at last; not like Byrne, at fever heat, but languidly, slowly, lazily, and constantly desiring a stimulant, saying, 'I must have it, I cannot work as I desire without it'. So he had it. Mr Moore did not prohibit him, but I tried to limit him to two bottles of wine a day, but sometimes he got spirits and became intoxicated; not like an ordinary 'drunk', but just smiling blandly and ceasing work. I made a sketch of him one day in his old Scotch bonnet, with his hair all abroad all over his face.

Wade concluded:

This was an exceedingly clever and learned man, self taught, I should say [but] there was no demand for talent in the colony in those days, and [except for] Mr Moore scarcely [any] for a mechanic, a carpenter or a smith.⁹

While working for Moore at Guildford, Carson was too distant from his family at Albion Town to return home daily. Nevertheless he was happy with the separation from his wife Ann, for according to Wade their house was 'a wreck and a misery' and the children were neglected and ill taught. Also for some years Ann had shown signs of being of unsound mind. At Guildford, Carson found peace and quiet in lodgings with another woman. On 30 August 1845 Ann complained to the local Justices of Peace asking for Government relief, saying that she and her three younger children were destitute and deserted.¹⁰ The eldest child George was already employed elsewhere at the tender age of ten years, possibly as a blacksmith's boy, for smithing was to become his trade. Ann set a precedent with her appeal, for she was the first in the colony to seek Government aid as a deserted wife. The Governor and Council moved quickly to preserve the lean coffers of the Treasury from similar requests. Within two days, on 1 September, they passed an Act in Council (No 9: Vic 2), published in the *Government Gazette*, making it obligatory for relatives to support destitute persons, under penalty of a maximum of three years' imprisonment. The Act also covered de facto wives and illegitimate children.

Carson refused to give a suitable allowance to Ann, so he was committed to the Round House Gaol at Fremantle for three months. The editor of the *Perth Gazette* on 6 September commented that Carson 'was estimated to be a good millwright ... and we can only regret that a person of Carson's character ... valuable in his particular avocation, should have placed himself in such a situation through sheer obstinacy.' Ann Carson received Government relief. The two Justices, W. L. Brockman of Herne Hill, and J. S. Harris of Strelley, were both well acquainted with the family, and they recommended that the children could be better maintained by William Martin and his wife, their neighbours, at Albion Town. The Justices thought, however, that it would be less costly to place them all in the Perth Hospital where Ann would receive suitable treatment. They believed that Carson, who had some affection for his children, would be more amenable if threatened with their removal from friends upon whom he had depended to give help when needed.

Despite the counsel of his friends, Carson remained in prison, obdurate and unrepentant, until the end of November, when he agreed to abandon the woman with whom he had been cohabiting, and he promised to support his wife and family. Even so, having been so long out of work he was unable to provide funds until 1 January 1846. Carson's work often took him away from Albion Town, and when his wife's mental condition worsened he paid his neighbours to keep an eye on her during his absence.

On 9 June 1847 Carson advertised in the *Inquirer* for 'suitable employment as a mechanic where he and his three children could be boarded at moderate terms', adding that the eldest child, a girl of eight years of age, was becoming useful. Girls as young as this were thought to be lucky if given a position as a 'teeny maid' in a gentleman's household where often she would be better fed, better clothed and better housed than if she remained with her parents. It is not known what response Carson received to this advertisement.

In those days when candles were used sparingly, settlers often used blackboy chips which, when thrown on coals, gave a brilliant light by which they could see to read, write or sew. The light, although bright, was spasmodic, so Carson devised a means of storing the sweet-scented gas in bullock bladders to give a continuous light sufficient to serve his needs in his home and workshop—a feat which the *Inquirer* noted on 12 September 1849.

When Carson's wife became very poorly on 5 July 1850, he asked Dr Viveash to attend her, and he visited her several times before she died on the 22nd. Evidence was given by Mr and Mrs John Spice that Alfred had paid her every attention and no blame was laid at his door.¹¹ After a decent interval, Alfred Carson married Ann Combes in February 1851. In October that year he won a lucrative Government contract worth £243 (about ten years' wages for a labourer in those days, although some men in the Civil Service earned £200 per annum) to construct a revolving apparatus for lights to be installed in a new lighthouse being built at Rottneest.¹² Carson then moved to Perth where he immersed himself in the mathematical problems of producing a flash, precisely every two minutes. He had to make the tools required for the job, as well as design the castings. Six months later, when the work was not completed, two gentlemen visited his workshop to view his progress. They left quite impressed by his ingenuity, and praised the admirable castings, with a beautifully worked black swan which he had added as an embellishment.¹³ Although when first viewed from Fremantle the lighthouse gave but 'a dim glim', Carson's revolving apparatus could not be faulted. To his gratification it was still functioning satisfactorily after more than a quarter of a century, when replaced by a modern lighthouse in 1877.

With his reputation thus assured, Carson moved to a place called 'Dove-bridge' at York, where he apparently was constructing a steam engine for a flour mill.¹⁴ There was competition since Solomon Cook had called upon his fellow American, John Byrne, to assist in building his steam flour mill at York. A laudatory report on Cook's steam mill appeared in the *Inquirer* of 28 January 1852, remarking that the engine was constructed on an entirely new principle. Carson's response was to publish a letter in the *Perth Gazette* on 13 February, voicing his concern that, although Cook did not claim to be the inventor, many readers would not know that Carson was the original designer of the new steam engine. He hoped to have his rights recognised (and protected) by seeking the help of Governor Fitzgerald, who was visiting York at the time. The Governor, however, did not have the time for Carson to raise steam in the model which he had made. So in April 1852 Carson wrote a very lengthy letter instead, describing the operation in great detail; but asking that his notes be kept confidential. He concluded:

I can prove I made the same discovery in August 1849, and it is but just that I should obtain the same privileges which are granted to other important discoveries of inventions. Therefore I should feel grateful if his Excellency would lend his influence towards obtaining patent for the same.

There is little doubt that John Byrne had observed Carson's work on his steam engine while both were employed by Samuel Moore. Moore had died suddenly in July 1849 when Carson was most in need of his patronage. Fitzgerald's reply on 29 April was encouraging—'the granting of a patent as requested does not fall within His Excellency's province as Governor, who will however further Mr Carson's views in any way in his power. 'His Excellency supports Registering the Steam Engine in question.'

Neither Carson's nor Cook's steam mill functioned satisfactorily. Nevertheless, Carson was anxious to protect his rights as inventor of the centrifugal engine. A year later, in April 1853, he wrote again from Dovebridge extolling its merits and explaining why the steam engines at York had not performed as well as expected. Carson blamed the wood used to fire the boilers. He dwelt upon the respective values of the timbers at Guildford and York, for giving not only a fierce, but a lasting heat, and commented also upon the foul water of the Avon as a detrimental factor. He explained also that his own engine, unlike Cook's, could transmit sufficient power to drive a pump, a blower and a condenser to purify the water, all from the same axis. Colonial Secretary merely noted on the correspondence that Carson sought a patent for his steam engine. People in high office gave little encouragement to those of lower social rank, especially when they wrote often and at great length to editors as well as to officials in the Civil Service.

Later that year Carson was again living at Perth. On 28 October 1853 he advertised in the *Perth Gazette* that he was in residence in Adelaide Terrace and was seeking 'support and patronage ... in his profession as an Engineer, wheelwright etc' He added as an afterthought, 'Clocks cleaned and repaired'. It is possible that his youngest child, Mary Ann, at ten years of age was no longer dependent upon him, while during the previous year his youngest son, Thomas, at ten years was employed in the bush as a stock minder by Richard Mayo, an innkeeper who managed a wayside inn on the Guildford-Toodyay Road. At the end of the boy's year of indenture Mayo refused to pay the balance of wages due to him. When Carson sued Mayo he learned that the boy had lost six sheep, as well as causing the death of a pony. As reported in the *Inquirer* on 1 September 1852 there was no redress for Carson, who was obliged to pay costs.

Carson did not remain long in Perth. His old employer, W. L. Brockman, was developing a pastoral run at 'Cheriton' on the Gingin Brook, planning to make it a profitable farm. The constant-flowing stream of water favoured the erection of a water mill. When Carson was offered this job he decided to settle there as a miller. He took up 20 acres of land and in due course, in July 1859 qualified for the title deeds, having fulfilled the necessary conditions of occupation and improvements.¹⁵ His son Thomas by then was working at 'Cowalla' on the Moore River, but in the same month of July 1859 died there of an accident. The Carson daughters had accompanied Carson to Gingin, where Frances was married to Ralph Thomas Dewar in 1858, and Mary Ann was to marry John Stewart in 1860. The eldest son, George, remained at Upper Swan where he was in business as a blacksmith and wheelwright. George married Charlotte Hadley and their son Alfred, born in November 1859, was to be his grandfather's pride. All these incidents had an unsettling effect. Carson contemplated moving to Upper Swan once more, having given up earlier plans to move to the Greenough.

Carson had apparently no intention of remaining in Gingin because in 1858, the year before young Thomas died, he applied for a tillage lease of one hundred acres in the Greenough district, where land was being opened up for small farmers. Confusion occurred over the relocation of Carson's selection, which included a narrow pass known as the Gorge, connecting the Front Flats with the Back Flats. The whole region from the Greenough to the Irwin had been dominated by pastoralists since 1850, chiefly the members of the Cattle Company—Phillips, Hamersley and Burges—all very influential men, and there was opposition from these at the appearance of small leaseholders. Carson saw opportunities for a millwright in a district about to become the granary of the colony, but L. C. Burges at 'Irwin House' foresaw difficulties of access to the Front Flats along a track through Carson's land. Carson had never seen the land he applied for, but was not inclined to change its location. For nearly a year he waged a wordy battle with the Colonial Secretary, the Survey Department, and also the Surveyor at Greenough, who attempted to solve the dispute.¹⁶ Carson eventually vented his spleen publicly in a long letter to the *Perth Gazette* on 25 March 1859, before finally relinquishing his claim and moving to Perth.

Carson was in Wellington Street, Perth, in 1861 when his next letter of protest was sent to the Colonial Secretary. An Intercolonial Exhibition was to be held in Melbourne, but the Western Australian Committee in charge of exhibits was of the opinion that 'works exclusively of art and industry, worthy of being sent to the Great Exhibition, may possibly be difficult of accomplishment in the colony.' In Carson's very long letter he mentioned two of his own inventions which could qualify as exhibits. One was an engine which could propel a boat or ship by steam power, without either paddles or screw; the other was a pneumatic machine unrivalled for producing a strong and steady blast which could be very useful in a chemist's laboratory or for blowing a large organ. Also he had several specimens of timber useful for specific purposes, not previously defined. Then he added an attack on the Government policy of allowing farm machinery and implements to be imported free of duty, while the price of iron and steel and working tools, which he used in making farm machinery, was much enhanced by taxation.¹⁷ Free trade was a hot topic with agriculturalists who were suffering from the import of cheap South Australian flour.

Colonial Secretary F. P. Barlee, who was a member of the Exhibition Committee, wrote a cool reply. 'Inform Mr Carson that I do not differ from some of his views. His proper course is to Memorialize the Governor in Council'. Officials were tiring of Carson's argumentative letters. Nevertheless he continued to seek attention from the Government. In March 1862 he applied for the post of an Instructing Warder with the Royal Engineers, a Department which was in charge of

many major public works.¹⁸ However the Royal Engineers were controlled by the Convict Establishment and there was no place in it for a civilian such as Carson.

A domestic matter which concerned Carson was the health of one of his daughters. The letter which he wrote from Guildford in August 1862 asked for her admission to the Colonial Hospital, but he was informed that she could not be received, and she was even denied accommodation in the Lunatic Asylum,¹⁹ where women suffering from delirium tremens were frequently treated. It was clear that Carson's children still depended upon him in time of trouble. A week later her husband offered to pay any charges and no further letters were written on that subject. Others written from Guildford and Fremantle in 1863 and from Gingin in 1864 indicate that Carson was at Upper Swan during 1863 but had no permanent home in any of these districts. For some years Carson's inventions were copied without his consent or benefit. Despite the Governor's affirmation in 1852 of support for registering Carson's invention, no regulations regarding letters patent had been enacted in the colony. Carson's concern was heightened when in 1863 he learnt that an Englishman had extended his patent rights to Western Australia, to protect his invention of a new method of excavating rock.

In October Carson wrote anxiously to the Colonial Secretary asking what conditions were required for his own applications for patents. Many of his plans of inventions were locked away. Early in 1864 Carson was commissioned by W. L. Brockman to construct a new reaping machine, improving upon his earlier model. He was planning to move back to Gingin where his work at Cheriton would be under public gaze and he feared his ideas would be pirated, as they had been in the past. Also he wished to make as many reaping machines as possible before the 1864 harvest to satisfy other customers.²⁰

An Act relating to Letters Patent in Western Australia came into force in March 1864. Although Carson wrote in April asking for details, a copy of the Ordinance was not sent to him until August. He learnt that patenting required a fee of £25, as well as full notes regarding the invention, and also a working model had to be supplied. Such conditions were difficult to meet by a man whose income was often insufficient for his family needs. Carson's reply in September indicated that his application may have been deferred. The final paragraph reads as follows:

I hope that too much will not be expected from me this year. I have to contend with much discouragement and various disappointments and even opposition, from those who voluntarily proffered their assistance, and to afford me facilities for carrying on my work, so that I am entirely dependent upon my own hard labour for everything; and it should be remembered that a Foundry (even on a small scale) and the most necessary appendages (besides the required model) requires much time and in the meantime I have to earn a living. But notwithstanding the great disadvantages under which I am labouring I hope to be able to prove satisfactorily the utility of my invention. ... I should have written sooner but sickness and other domestic afflictions have prevented me.²¹

While waiting for a reply regarding the patenting procedures, Carson endeavoured to find other means of earning a living. In May he applied for the position of Postmaster at Gingin but was informed that the schoolmaster would receive that appointment.²² The special skills which he possessed were rarely in demand, and work was hard to find. Among the tasks he performed during the following decade was the installation of the clock in the new Perth Town Hall in 1869. He was commissioned also to design and make the weathervane for the soaring spire of Wesley Church, which was completed in 1870. John Summers, the blacksmith in Hay Street, offered Carson the facilities of his workshop to complete this work. When Robert Cecil Clifton in 1875

began building organs for colonial churches he enlisted Carson's help to determine the correct length and diameter of the organ pipes. According to family legend, Carson made a six-keyed flute from a gun barrel upon which he played with admirable skill. His studies in these fields included calculations to the ninth decimal point, covering pages of figures. He was credited also with the installation of the first steam-driven printing press when the *West Australian* (originally the *Perth Gazette*, and then for a few years in the 1870s the *West Australian Times*) bought a modern Wharfedale printing press during the 1880s.²³

The story of these achievements was handed down through Alfred Carson's grandson's family. Alfred Carson, the younger, was educated at Guildford Government School and in 1877, at the early age of eighteen years, was appointed assistant master at Perth Boys' School. A year later he was the headmaster of a boys' school at Geraldton where his father, George Carson, soon joined him with other members of his family. Young Alfred Carson became involved in editing the newspaper at Geraldton and, when he moved to Perth in the 1890s, quickly rose through the ranks to become editor of the *West Australian*, the leading newspaper in the colony. He is remembered today for his outstanding contribution to social welfare.²⁴

Alfred Carson senior suffered the bereavement of his second wife in 1869 and for several years was befriended by John Summers, the Perth blacksmith who became a prosperous carriage builder and wheelwright, employing many workmen. Summers commissioned Carson to install a forge blower capable of servicing seven forges at the same time and dispensing with bellows, a task which Carson accomplished with ease, having perfected the original forge blower designed in 1844.²⁵ Summers was impressed by the workmanship and mechanical knowledge displayed by Carson in his earlier years and although Carson was not able, through age and infirmity, to do much work, he was very useful with ideas on machinery in Summer's establishment and thus earned his accommodation.

Carson, in his old age, suffered from rheumatism and sciatica which quite crippled him. He left Perth late in 1876 to live at Upper Canning with his daughter Mary Ann, whose husband John Stewart was working for Thomas Buckingham. They had several children and Mary Ann was pregnant. They could ill afford to keep Carson also. Improvidence, the burden of domestic afflictions, lack of business enterprise and possibly a preference for study instead of labour, all contributed to Carson's inability to provide for his old age. In a long letter to the Colonial Secretary, written on 23 May 1877, he pleaded for a little pecuniary aid.²⁶

Carson wrote with pride of his early work, much of it done with little encouragement under great disadvantages, all of which contributed to the welfare and development of the colony. He acknowledged the kindness of Summers and the efforts of his daughter and son-in-law to make him com-. All he asked for was a little regular money so that he could spend his few remaining years with his children without being a burden to them. He was in fact in dread of his decline in the social scale and being classed as a pauper. This letter was backed by testimonials from Summers and Buckingham. The Colonial Secretary, A. G. Lefroy, was sympathetic and recommended that Carson should receive an allowance of £25 per annum, which would be the amount he would cost the colony for clothes and maintenance if he had to be admitted into the Mt Eliza Depot, the last and dreaded refuge for destitute old men. Carson received this reply in August, three months after his plea was received.

Alfred Carson died eleven years later on 6 September 1888 at the age of 78 years. His death was registered by William Dale. Superintendent of the Mt Eliza Depot where Carson would have been an inmate. The undertaker's announcement in the *Inquirer* of 7 September that the funeral would take place at half past nine on the morning of the 8th, added 'Friends will kindly accept this intimation to attend'. A brief note which appeared in the same paper stated that 'A very old colonist, in the person of Mr Alfred Carson passed away last night... The deceased was for many years a contributor to the press on scientific and other subjects, in which he displayed the possession of no inconsiderable amount of sound practical sense.' William Wade's assessment of Carson's achievements is worthy of notice. He thought that Carson was 'a strange compound—there was no subject—science, mechanics, history, religion, astronomy, natural history, of which he did not know something ... from cutting a tombstone, making a plough, to distilling gas from the blackboy ... To a new process of applying steam to machinery, which ... must have been something akin to a turbine'—which incidentally was not patented in other parts of the world for years to come.²⁷

No headstone marks his grave in the East Perth Cemetery. Carson never patented any of his inventions and the fate of his designs which he had locked away is unknown. A man of genius, he was little appreciated in his day and is almost forgotten in present time, his memory overshadowed by the remarkable public career of his grandson and namesake.

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