

Royal Western Australian Historical Society's  
Annual Pioneers Memorial Service  
on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> May 2006 at St Bartholomews Chapel, East Perth Cemeteries,

Commemorating Unmarked Graves

Citation by Ruth Marchant James

The remains of numerous Australian inhabitants, ranging from members of the indigenous, European and Asian races, as well as explorers, pioneer men and women, labourers, landowners, officials and paupers, lie buried in unmarked sites across the width and breadth of this large continent. East Perth Cemetery, the first designated burial ground to be set aside in the Swan River Colony, is no exception. Indeed present research suggests that of the near 10,000 Western Australian pioneers interred in this hallowed ground, before it closed in 1899, only 773 headstones now exist. Surveyed in November 1829, the first burial took place in the hilltop cemetery, or 'Boot Hill' as it was later irreverently referred to, on 6 January 1830 with the death of John Mitchell, a 22 year-old private of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Regiment.

Today we honour and remember the large number of early settlers who, like Mitchell, have no headstones or memorials to mark the spot where their remains lie buried. The original tombstones or wooden crosses that once identified a large number of gravesites have either disintegrated with the passage of time, been removed, or vandalised over the years, whilst the majority of paupers, itinerates and persons without family, were understandably never recognised. Only eight surviving headstones from the original Jewish / Hebrew cemetery site were transferred to the corner of Wickham and Plain Streets when the old portion of their allotted burial ground was resumed and used for housing. Fortunately, most of the original names have since been recorded and a memorial erected by the Jewish community now acknowledges people of that faith earlier laid to rest. Likewise, when the Chinese section, once located behind the old Presbyterian burial ground, was also excised for development, a commemorate monument to deceased Chinese pioneers was raised in their memory by the Chinese community in 1994 and a brass plaque placed on the original site. Headstones, retrieved from the original Presbyterian burial ground, which is now a car park, were replaced in the fenced-in area of the cemetery on a reclaimed section of Horatio Street.

Death is not and never has been selective and the final call certainly knows no social boundaries. As with most consecrated burial sites, the rich and famous lay side by side with the poor and unobtrusive members of the community in the East Perth Cemetery. In the founding years of the colony the infant and child death toll was exceedingly high and the premature deaths of adults not uncommon. Cemetery records endlessly reveal a list of repeated causes rarely heard of in modern times. These included loss of life as a result of apoplexy, visitation, rheumatic fever, convulsions, mortification, dropsy, consumption, colonial fever, dysentery, whooping cough, childbirth, water-on-the brain, inflammation of the lungs, as well as excessive drinking. Suicides, being buried alive in wells and sand falls, falling from a horse, fatal injuries by horse-led carts and accidental drownings, were regularly documented along with general debility, as reasons for the demise of many early citizens. As colonists these individuals made an enormous contribution to the establishment of Perth and the colony's fledgling settlements.

Buried in a gravesite minus a headstone, Dr John Whatley, surgeon and agriculturalist, was one such pioneer. Accompanied by his wife Anne and two small daughters Whatley arrived on the *Atwick*, some four months after the foundation of the colony, and was granted 1000 acres of land which ran from the present railway station at Bayswater to the river. Sharing an

optimistic view of life in their adopted country Anne Whatley confidently recorded in her diary: 'We were much interested in planning our house to be divided into six rooms and to have glass windows and a floor, the outer doors to be of native mahogany of which John cut down a fine tree at Perth'. After attending Colonel Lautour's sale at Fremantle in mid-September 1830 to buy a cow and a side saddle, both Dr Whatley and Captain John Macdowell Stroyen were tragically drowned whilst ferrying the purchased goods across the Swan River. John Whatley was just 32 years of age when he lost his life and, two months after his burial on 19 September 1830 in the East Perth Cemetery his bereaved family returned to England aboard the *Cleopatra*. TheTSoc or's grave was left unmarked due to the suddenness of their departure, or whether the original headstone was later destroyed is not known. Among other colonial surgeons laid to rest in the old pioneer cemetery without a headstone were Dr Charles Simmons, who died in 1831, and Doctors John Harris and Richard Brinsley Hinds RN both of whom were interred in the 1840s.

We also dedicate this day to popular bandmaster Lieutenant John Joseph Bryan, better known throughout his lifetime by the Christian name of Thomas. Born in India in 1852, he was the son of a soldier serving with the 96<sup>th</sup> Regiment, who came to Western Australia in 1863 to take up an appointment as bandmaster to an Imperial Regiment. Young Thomas, who was also musically talented, joined the Fremantle Volunteers Band and for a time performed under the conductorship of his father. He later became a member of the Perth Volunteers and when his father retired from the military band he was elected in 1878 to replace him as bandmaster. In 1897, after 33 years service, Thomas was appointed lieutenant and continued to conduct the group which later became known as the Headquarters Band. Widely regarded as a loyal and talented leader Lieutenant Bryan, who never missed a review in 37 years, was also a well-known identity in the Perth printing industry.

In 1901, Lieutenant Thomas Bryan was afforded the honour of leading the massed bands chosen to perform at Flemington, Victoria, during the Royal Visit to celebrate the foundation of the Commonwealth. Regrettably he suffered a fatal heart attack just before the commencement of the Federation March and was held in such esteem that the then Premier, George Throssell, personally made arrangements for his remains to be brought back to Western Australia by the *SS Pilbarra*. The impressive funeral procession left the late lieutenant's home in Murray Street on Sunday 2 June 1901, accompanied by three bands taking turns to play the *Dead March*, and after a service in St Mary's Cathedral, proceeded down Lord Street to Adelaide Terrace, wending its way via Bennet Street and the former Forrest Avenue into the Roman Catholic portion of the East Perth Cemetery where he was buried with full military honours. Among the huge crowd of mourners in attendance were Governor Sir Arthur Lawley, the new Premier of Western Australia George Leake, various military personnel and a 50 member firing squad, Wreaths were laid by hundreds of well-wishers, including representatives from old established Perth firms and members of the Theatre Royal Orchestra.

In the Holy Year Celebration in 2000 Bishop Healy officiated at a ceremony when a small Celtic Cross, transferred from Karrakatta, was re-erected as a memorial to six Roman Catholic priests who were originally laid to rest without a headstone in the East Perth Cemetery. Father John Coyle accompanied the colony's first Roman Catholic Bishop John Brady to Perth in 1851 and loyally stood by the controversial Irish clergyman when he fell out with Bishop Serra, a Spanish Benedictine. The young Father Coyle was illegally appointed Vicar-General by Bishop Brady and consequently excommunicated by Archbishop Polding of Sydney. On 23 December 1853 the ill-advised priest met an early death at the age of 36 through dysentery, whilst a patient at the Perth Colonial Hospital. Reconciled with the Church, during Bishop Brady's absence, he at least experienced a peaceful spiritual end to his short turbulent life. A second priest commemorated in the year 2000, Father Thomas O'Neill, arrived in 1853 with Bishop Salvado and was soon afterwards appointed prison

chaplain at Fremantle Gaol. He proved to be a popular figure, but was unprepared for the bigotry he encountered in some quarters and lacking maturity his outspoken involvement became counterproductive. Eight months after his arrival the 24-year old Irish priest died unexpectedly on 25 April 1854 and was buried in the pioneer cemetery at East Perth. Similarly another youthful Catholic priest, Father Michael Kirwan, was appointed chaplain in 1869 to a party of convicts stationed at Guildford and later served at Albany, Newcastle and Perth. Afflicted with poor health Father Kirwan died at the age of 30 on 14 November 1872. Forty-three year-old Father John Joseph Quinn, a former professor of history at Longford Ireland unfortunately spent only three months in the colony before he died suddenly of heart disease on 23 September 1896.

Father Denis Paul Long, who served in both the Murchison and Eastern Goldfields, was buried close to the original entrance leading to the Roman Catholic section. It was during his time at Kanowna that he naively made headlines when publicity over a fake nugget led to an unexpected gold rush and a great deal of angst. Recalled to Perth the mortified 29-year-old priest died of typhoid fever in the Perth Public Hospital on 14 May 1899. The sixth priest to be recognised, Father William Prendergast, a former Dominican turned secular, served the people of Roeboume, Geraldton, Toodyay, Northam, Guildford, Southern Cross, Kanowna and Coolgardie before failing health led to his admittance to St John of God Hospital, Subiaco, and to his death on 2 July 1899 aged fifty-seven.

James Woodward Turner, a London businessman, arrived on the *Warrior* on 12 March 1830 and became one of Augusta's original settlers. His successful application for land included a list of 21 general servants and a long list of imports for which he was granted 20, 026 acres of land. Turner accompanied the Molloy and Bussell families when they departed for Augusta and to accommodate his wife Maria and eight of their nine offspring Turner erected a pre-fabricated house that he had imported to the colony and named Albion Cottage. Involved in trading, he built a 40-ton boat in 1844 called the *Alpha*. After the failure of the south-west settlement and the exodus of its settlers James Turner set up residence in Adelaide Terrace, Perth, and became a general dealer in Howick (now Hay) Street. James Woodward Turner died when he was 83 on 13 November 1862, but for whatever reason his grave remains without a headstone.

The Sherwoods, Frederick, his wife Jessie and their sons Henry and Alfred, members of a well-known pioneering family share the same fate. Brought out to the colony as a surveyor, under contract to Marshall Clifton at Australind, Frederick did not foresee that, due to financial problems, his position with the West Australian Company no longer existed. New opportunities were boundless however, and throughout his life Frederick Sherwood held positions in the civil service and worked as an accountant, architect, builder, surveyor, school teacher, part-time farmer and brewer. Despite the lack of identification in the East Perth Cemetery the family's name is perpetuated in the creation of Sherwood Court.

Thomas and Catherine Davis, son John and small daughter Charlotte arrived in the Swan River Colony with the first group of settlers aboard the *Parmelia*, Born in 1799 in England and married in 1822 to Thomas, a blacksmith who was employed at the government depot at Mt Eliza, Catherine was only 37 years-old when she passed away in 1885 and her remains like so many other early settlers occupy a site without a headstone. The list of unmarked graves is long, and for many the backgrounds and tribulations of their earthly lives remain shrouded in mystery. This afternoon we break with a 52-year-old tradition and instead of commemorating pioneers in legible gravesites we have chosen instead to honour those, who because they have been buried without visible identification, could so easily have been forgotten. As one unknown poet observed:

*If the lonely graves are scattered in that fenceless vast God's acre: if no bells chime across them, and no mourners tread between, Yet, the souls of those sound sleepers go as swiftly to*

*their Maker and the ground is just as sacred, and the graves are just as green.* In April 1899 the first burial took place at the new cemetery at Karrakatta. It is to be hoped that with the cemetery renewal program presently taking place history will not repeat itself and that future generations will not be left with endless rows of unmarked graves in Karrakatta, a repository full of records and a plea for countless volunteers to act as caretakers.