

ADDRESS FOLLOWING ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

WHO'S DOWN THERE? Church of England Burials in Wollongong

Following our Annual General Meeting we were favoured with a very interesting address by Carol Herben in which she outlined the history of burials in the early days of European settlement in Wollongong and some of the problems that have arisen from a lack of early records and from anomalies in those which do exist.

As far as Carol could ascertain, the earliest recorded burial was that of Elizabeth Tate, wife of George Tate of Springhill, who died on 23rd January, 1827, and was buried on the property. Two more burials occurred between then and 1835, those of Mrs Rock and Trooper Shannon, both buried near the site of the Brighton Hotel, but Shannon's body was later exhumed and re-interred in the old Roman Catholic burial ground at the eastern extremity of Crown Street on the southern side. In 1833 the body of Jonathan Brooker of Corrimal was transported to Campbelltown where he was buried in St Peter's churchyard, at that time the nearest consecrated ground. It was about this time that the Roman Catholic burial ground mentioned above came into use near what later became the showground, now being transformed into an entertainment centre.

In Major Mitchell's 1834 town plan a two-acre lot was set aside for a burial ground bounded by Crown, Kembla and Burelli Streets, but Rev Wilkinson protested that this was too close to residences. Only two or three burials ever took place there* before Mr Wilkinson began making Protestant burials on a site near the beach immediately south of the Roman Catholic site, separated from it by Burelli Street which continued towards the beach in those days. Nowadays it must be under part of Steelers Stadium.

Those who could afford it still sent their relatives to Campbelltown, but the remainder continued to be buried at the "sandhill." Carol listed many of these burials, including that of Lieutenant Otway of the 50th Regiment who died by his own hand at Geard's Hill in April 1836. The Rev Matthew Devenish Meares, who succeeded Rev Wilkinson in late 1837, continued to use the Burelli Street site.

By about 1838 Protestant burials had commenced at a site bounded by Kembla and Bank Streets, then known as the Episcopalian burial ground, now called Pioneer Park. One of the first burials at this 2-acre site was that of Sarah, wife of Charles Throsby Smith, who died on 26th December, 1838. This cemetery remained in use until the last burial in 1919, but for many years before that it had been restricted to family connections. Nobody knows how many burials took place there. Carol and her husband John have

traced 205 but suspect the real number may be in excess of 400.

The first part of the Wollongong General Cemetery as we know it today began south of Fox Ave where in 1843 a section was set aside for the old Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational burial grounds. Prior to this the three churches had used Pioneer Park. The second section of the General Cemetery was dedicated in 1867. Here the Roman Catholic Church commenced burials in 1869, the Church of England in 1889 and the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches in the 1930s.

Carol concluded with many anecdotes about aberrations in burial records; changes in family names brought about by second marriages; exhumations and re-burials; errors on tombstones; unmarked graves and hosts of other problems. Her talk created a lot of interest from our members and visitors, one of whom was able to find out where her mother's grave is located; and for my own part I am now certain that my great-grandmother Rebecca Osborne who was buried by Matthew Devenish Meares in 1844 must be somewhere in Pioneer Park.

Frank Osborne

* Captain Waldron and Mrs Grover in 1834 were the only two recorded. Both were later moved to Pioneer Park.