

# ORBOST & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY Inc.

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## NEWSLETTER

No. 113 November 2014

### ORBOST CEMETERY and some early burials

- by *Lindsay and Noreen Thomson*

**Orbost Public Cemetery** was officially gazetted in November 1891 when 5 acres 2 roods and 20 perches of timbered land on a ridge on the eastern side of the town was reserved for a cemetery. No records exist for burials that had taken place on this land before it was officially a Cemetery. In 1950 the reserve was extended by a further 2 acres.

In 1975 a **lawn cemetery** dedicated to Mr Eric Wehner was established below the Anglican section with the bronze name plaques laid level with the ground surface.

A **niche wall** was constructed near the main gate in 1990 for placement of cremated remains. A new lawn section with less maintenance has been used since 1993, with burials either side of a low triangular shaped concrete wall sitting on a concrete base. The bronze name plaques are now fixed to the wall to keep them up off the ground.

In 1997 a **monumental lawn section** to cater for all denominations with only a headstone on the grave was created on the southern side of the main road running through the cemetery.

The need for a **serenity garden** to remember loved ones was established in 2000 with small bronze plaques fixed to pieces of rock in the gardens and the kerbing around the gardens.

The cemetery now has a **Reflections Building** built in 2013. To help finance this building paving bricks around

this building were sold and have the name of the purchaser engraved into them. The exterior brick walls of this building have been designed as **niche walls** with deeper holes being able to hold the cremated remains of a couple.

The Cemetery was first managed by people selected from the local community and appointed by the Public Health Dept. In 1894 the management was handed over to the Shire until it was returned to the Community in 1937. Mr Eric Wehner became the Cemetery Trust administrator for the next 53 years (1937 -1991). While he was away at WW2 for 5 years his sister Mrs Hilda Hobson filled his position. Mrs Judy Balmer is the current administrator.

#### Oldest headstone - Elizabeth Whelan 1890



The oldest headstone in the Cemetery is in the Catholic section, **Elizabeth Whelan**, a 16 yr old girl who died on 21/11/1890. The next day the local newspaper [SRM] states she had been living at Mr Ashcroft's on the Island and in the afternoon had a violent fit which caused her death. Elizabeth was born in Kilmore Vic. in 1874 the daughter of Peter Whelan a farmer and a land holder at Marlo [on Whelan's Island] and Margaret nee Connelly.

**Burials in the Anglican Section**

In the Anglican section another early headstone is that of **Thomas Hext**. He came to Orbost and reopened the Commercial Bank on 8/4/1896 as the new manager. Mr Hext died on 22/7/1897 aged 43 after fifteen months in Orbost. He was born in Devonshire, England and had been in Australia for twenty years. About two weeks before his death he attended a concert at Jarrahmond, the next day he contracted a severe cold. This led to pleurisy which led to his death [SRM].



A grave in the second row of the Anglican section with no headstone contains the bodies of three **Ashcroft children Nellie 9, James 7 and Annie 2** who died on 8/2/1900 in a tent fire while camping at Cape Conran. It appears the mosquitos were bad and at about 2am some dry horse manure was burnt in the tent to keep them out. The manure was kicked outside and thought to be extinguished, the wind blowing at the time must have ignited the manure and blown some on to the tent which caused the fire. Four other members of the family were also severely hurt in this terrible accident.

**Hugh Williams** for nearly forty years conducted many of the burials in this Cemetery. He died aged 83 on 15/10/1950. Hugh was a local builder and acquired James Pleydell's funeral business in 1911. His advert. in the SRM in Sept. 1911 shows a horse drawn hearse with

plumes. In a advert. beside the Williams one is that of T J McCoy which shows that he also conducts funerals in a glass hearse from his coach factory in Wolseley Street opposite the Police Station.



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**HUGH WILLIAMS**

DEGS to announce that he has taken over the Undertaking Business formerly carried on by Mr James Pleydell and is prepared to conduct Funerals in any part of the district at reasonable rates.

All conveniences supplied on application.

**Henry Cottman** set up as a chemist and surgeon dentist in Orbost in 1898 retiring in about 1928 and died on 24/7/1933. In 1913 his advertisement in the SRM shows that he traded both as chemist and optician. He was also into bee keeping and had about 100 hives in Stanley Street.

**Lancelot Herbert** died in 12/6/1911. He came to Orbost in 1886, taking up a partnership with local store-owner George Temple. After Mr Temple's death in 1891, Lancelot took over the store and progressively developed Herberts Snowy River Stores

which grew into a department store of several shops along Nicholson St. He also had small shops at Cann River, Noorinbee and Genoa which were run by members of his family, as well as a carrying business and fuel outlets. Lancelot and his wife Maptha [died 1945] are buried in a joint grave.



**Henry James** was 72 when he died in a tragic accident with cyanogas [a rabbit fumigant] on 11/5/1932 in his office in Nicholson St. He was a stock and station agent and a large land holder around the Orbost district. Henry held his first auction sale in Orbost on 19/1/1895 at the mart on the corner of Nicholson and Tarra Streets. He was a local councillor and J P. The seed bean industry was started by Mr James after he purchased the old butter factory on the cr. of Browning & Lochiel Sts. to sort and clean the dry beans. [Refer to **Newsletter 94**, Feb. 2013 **Henry James - his life and unusual death**].

**James Nixon** was born in Macclesfield, Cheshire, England and came to Australia in 1853. In 1882 he and his large family selected land at Pumpkin Point. James died 3/1/1897 aged 66, six days after a serious accident with his horse while droving cattle. James had the first sawmill in the Orbost township, located just to the east of the present town, near Snaggers Lane. [Refer to **From White Knowle to Pumpkin Point**, Peter Nixon, 2003].

**Lillias Maria Waller** died in 10/3/1921 aged 73. She was born in Coburg Vic., a daughter of James Robertson first land holder at Lochend. Lillian operated the first confectionery shop in Orbost in Nicholson St. [somewhere near the entrance to the Foodworks car park is now]. In 1891 she was one of the 57 Orbost women who signed the petition for Women's Suffrage in Victoria. [Refer to **Newsletter 85**, March 2013 **The 1891 Petition for Women's Suffrage**].

**Charles Henry [Carl] Grove** died on 17/4/1938 at Box Hill at the age of 88 and was buried in Orbost. Prior to coming to the Snowy River district, Carl worked as overseer on Buchan Station. In 1880, he selected land at Newmerella after first coming here in 1874 with early selector James A Robertson. He married Annie Robertson in 1876. Carl was a farmer, hop and seed grower and nurseryman. He was an elected Councillor of the newly formed Tambo Shire in 1882, and then in 1892 to the Orbost Shire where he served for many years filling various public roles. In 1911, he shifted to Queensland, but later returned to Victoria and died at Box Hill.

**Clyde [Carl] Drevermann** died on 15/11/1946 aged 72. He was born in Lucknow and went into partnership with E P Reynolds on 9/8/1902 in Orbost selling furnishings, general ironmongery, furniture and tinsmith items. This partnership did not last long as on 6/9/1902 the shop then operated as Carl Drevermann & Co. later to become the Orbost Hardware & Timber Co. Mr Reynolds relocated the tinsmith part of the business to a new address. Mr Drevermann was a keen motorist and promoter of East Gippsland during the time when motor tourism was in its infancy.

**Edward James Pardew** died in 26/9/1927 aged 92. He came to Orbost from New Zealand in 1886 and selected 720 acres of hill land in the Brodrigg area. He was a member of the first Orbost Shire Council. His daughter had a fruit & meat shop in McLeod Street.

**William John Warren** died in 15/1/1948 aged 74. He was a farmer and lived on the edge of Newmerella Hill overlooking his farmland. William's wife **Helena Frances Warren** died on 17/11/1962 at the age of 91 years and was born at Bulumwaal, Vic. in 1871. She was a noted photographer in the district and was the one who supplied all the photos for the "Back to Orbost" book in 1937.

**Harold Martin Jorgenson** died on 12/8/1956 aged 89. He was born in Oslo, Norway and came out to Australia as a ship's carpenter. A few weeks after arriving in Melbourne he joined the crew of the "Neptune" in 1889 to sail to Sydney with a load of 400 cases of dynamite and general cargo. In a violent rain storm the boat was driven on to rocks near Pearl Point and broke up. After several days he walked to Marlo where he settled for the rest of his life. He cut timber and worked on the paddle boats and barges on the Snowy River. At one time he was the Harbour Master at Marlo. In later life he ran two motor boats for fishing and pleasure trips.

**Sarah Pleydell** died on 15/8/1914 aged 71. She was born in Parramatta NSW, becoming the wife



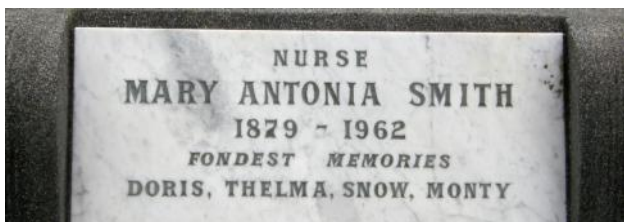
of John Pleydell. In 1884 the Pleydells with their 10 children left Delegate to make their way to Orbost. The journey took 5 or 6 days after having to cut a track as they went as there was no road to Orbost. Mr Pleydell got the job of being in charge of the drainage of the Bete Bolong flats and also worked as a road contractor.

### Burials in the Catholic Section

A headstone in the Catholic section has the names of two of the workers killed in an explosion on the 13/3/1914 while working on the Newmerella cutting during construction of the train line to Newmerella [Orbost] - **John William Carroll** 50 and his son **Peter Paul Carroll** 18. Another man, **John Sullivan** was also killed in this tragic accident. The accident happened when a hole drilled about 10 feet deep into the cutting had been filled with 2½ barrels of blasting powder failed to explode when fired. After work the next day, they were digging the charge out when it went off killing all three men.

**John Frederick [Fred] McCoy** died on 25/5/1948 when he was 61. Fred had a fibrous plaster factory at the corner of Browning St. & Lind Lane, now a car park. The plaster sheets & cornices were made on concrete tables. He also had a small hardware shop on the Browning St. side of the factory.

**Mary Antonia Smith** [often referred to as Nurse Smith]. She was born in 1879 and died on 23/11/1962 aged 83. Nurse Smith was Orbost's first nursing sister, first practicing in McLeod Street. Up to this time there had never been a doctor in the district. In an emergency a doctor from Bairnsdale would make the long trip to Orbost. Nurse Smith later established a private hospital at the old police station in what is now No 9 Tara Street. When Dr. Kerr arrived in 1889, he and Nurse Smith were the only qualified medical and nursing people in town.



### Burials in the Presbyterian Section

**Dr James Kerr** was born in 1862 in Dumfries, Scotland and died on 28/6/1928 at the age 65. He settled in Orbost in 1889 as the local doctor. Dr Kerr traveled long distances on horseback to attend to his patients anywhere between Buchan and Cann River. He served the district until 1923, being the only doctor for over 30 years. His wife, **Hilda Kerr** [nee

Temple] was a multi-talented woman, being a musician, artist, and writer of poetry and plays. Her parents were Orbost shopkeepers, George and Mary Temple [see below].



### Temple family grave

This is a large grave and headstone for several members of this early Orbost family. George and Mary were early shopkeepers who operated a store opposite the Post Office for many years. Their daughters were very talented women. After George's death in 1918, this store was purchased by the Herberts.



**John Rowe** died 29/9/1920 aged 57 and is remembered as Orbost's pioneer school teacher, coming here in 1886 to take charge of two half-time schools at Orbost and Jarrahmond. Orbost had just 9 pupils at that time. Mr Rowe lived in a tent alongside Archie Munro's bookshop [old CWA hall site]. The Orbost State School was a rented room next to Borland's blacksmith shop located between Nicholson and Munro Streets. It was a very humble beginning.

REFERENCES: mainly

- *Snowy River Mail* obituaries and death notices
- Headstones in Orbost Cemetery
- *Personalities and Stories of the Early Orbost District*, compiled by Mary Gilbert, 1972
- *In Times Gone By*, by Deborah Hall, 2002
- *White Knowle to Pumpkin Point*, Peter Nixon, 2002