

Port Fairy Public Cemetery

A Garth, 2009

I have selected the Port Fairy Public Cemetery, used for burials since the mid nineteenth century, for this project. Many of the markers placed there in the nineteenth century have disappeared but enough remain to suggest local sentiments concerning death and religion. Of course, the extant memorials are the most durable and were probably erected by the more prosperous residents. Cemetery records for the nineteenth century have not survived but brief burial records exist dating from the end of that century until the present. Between the late nineteenth century and the 1950s grave sites were purchased in areas laid out in rectilinear form and divided by denominations – Roman Catholic, Church of England, Presbyterian and Methodist. From the early 1960s grave sites were available in lawn areas with a rectilinear design and the same four denominational divisions. In the 1980s another lawn area was created with no distinction made between the religious affiliations, if any, of the people buried there, an indication of the growing secularisation of society. The word 'public' in the cemetery's nomenclature refers to the fact that it was not created to hold the dead of a single Christian denomination but was open to anyone who could purchase a grave site and, through provision for the burial of 'paupers', those who could not. Significant changes have occurred in religious beliefs and social attitudes during the existence of the Port Fairy Public Cemetery and they will be examined as the investigation of some of the epitaphs proceeds.

Jalland writes that the British Metropolitan Interment Act of 1850 was a landmark in funeral and burial reform that stimulated the development of public cemeteries there and in the Australian colonies.¹ The new cemeteries were 'public' because they were not controlled by a particular religious denomination and granted the right of burial to anyone who paid. A series of Burial Acts in the 1850s resulted in Churches abandoning responsibility for the burial of the dead in favour of urban municipalities and private interests.² It began a process in which, according to Tony Walter,

1 Pat Jalland, *Australian Ways of Death, a Social and Cultural History 1840-1918*, OUP, 2002, p. 10.

2 Tony Walter, 'Secularisation', in Colin Parkes, Pitu Laungani & Bill Young (eds.), *Death and Bereavement Across*

the church has lost control of the dying and also of the dead.³ The burial of the dead was increasingly treated as a public responsibility, although it could be handled by business enterprises when large amounts of private capital were required. Laqueur claims that the major cities of the British Empire contained, by 1850, cemeteries dissociated from any church and operated for profit.⁴ Within two decades, he says, the church of England lost its near monopoly over the dead and individual property in graves was established. His contention is that death had met with capitalism and the market economy.⁵ One feature of capitalist society was the comparatively large number of people who expressed mortality in their funerary monuments.⁶ Griffin and Tobin note that in England in the first half of the Nineteenth century the public cemetery was becoming more common.⁷ In New South Wales the early cemeteries were public in the sense that they were open to all and created and paid for by the colonial government.⁸

The Port Fairy Public Cemetery contains interesting examples of funerary monuments which indicate that there was a preoccupation with death in the latter part of the nineteenth century. At least part of the explanation may result from high rates of death in the Victorian era. Many families experienced the death of at least one member and the death of several, including infants and children, was common.

Ruth Richardson suggests that the Victorian celebration of death was a complex phenomenon so that its historical roots are rarely simple, or easily discernible. She understands that there may be many explanations as to why death was a big issue in Victorian Britain. Undoubtedly death was treated seriously, both individually and socially, especially by members of the increasingly important middle-class. Much time, money and social prestige was invested in elaborate funerals, mourning rituals and funerary memorials. Richardson rightly reminds us that funerary display is to

Cultures, Routledge, 1997, p. 177.

3 Ibid.

4 Thomas W. Laqueur, 'Cemeteries, religion and the culture of capitalism', in Jane Garnett & Colin Matthew (eds.), *Revival and religion Since the 1700s, Essays for John Walsh*, Hambledon Press, 1993, p. 80.

5 Ibid.

6 Robert Cecil, 'Introduction', in *The Masks of Death: Changing Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century*, Book Guild, 1991, p. 26.

7 Graeme M. Griffin & Des Tobin, *In the Midst of Life: the Australian Response to Death*, Melbourne University Press, 1997, p. 62.

8 Ibid, p. 60.

be expected of a society experiencing social upheaval and the flux associated with industrialisation and colonialism. Especially one that was obsessively interested in social gradations. Death served as a prime means of expressing and defining social position and status.⁹ Glennys Howarth writes that the cost and nature of funerals have been used to display status and power in society, so that, as funerary memorials were meant to last and were publicly displayed, they could be, and were, used to express sentiments considered appropriate, and also to indicate the social position of the people who erected them in the Victorian period.

The Victorian cult of death seems to have fully developed after the passing of the 1850 Metropolitan Interment Act, which spurred the creation of extra-mural [outside town and city boundaries] cemeteries in urban centres in England, although London's Kensal Green and others already existed. To the question regarding a specifically British way of death, Howarth answers that the most striking and memorable representatives of death in nineteenth century England were the flamboyant funeral processions and elaborate extra-mural cemeteries after 1850.¹⁰ She writes that inhumation in private graveyards was soon considered to be a symbol of wealth.¹¹ From that tended to spring notions of the 'decent' funeral, including a desire for a respectable funerary display which, says Richardson, was a powerful social statement, denoting social aspiration and celebrating the financial ability to honour the dead in an acceptable way.¹² The Duke of Wellington's funeral in 1852 has been called the finest Victorian funeral, designed to honour his memory and impress the British population.¹³ Jalland is convinced that early Victorian middle and upper classes spent much money on impressive funerals and argues that extravagant and expensive funerals were copied by the affluent, and expanding, middle-class.¹⁴ Richardson concludes that the Victorian emphasis on funerary display and extravagance was already well established in the the Georgian era.¹⁵ But the

9 Ruth Richardson, 'Why was death so big in Victorian Britain?' in Ralph Houlbrooke (ed.), *Death, Ritual, and Bereavement*. Routledge, 1989, p. 105. Richardson argues that the history of anatomical endeavour was a potent influence on the Victorian death culture. See p. 106.

10 Glennys Howarth, 'Is There a British Way of Death?', in Kathy Charmaz, Glennys Howarth & Allan Kellehear, (eds.), *The Unknown Country: Death in Australia, Britain and the US*, Macmillan, 1997, p. 87.

11 Ibid.

12 Richardson, 'Why was death so big in Victorian Britain?', p. 115.

13 Pat Jalland, *Australian Ways of Death*, p. 112.

14 Ibid, p. 108.

15 Richardson, 'Why was death so big in Victorian Britain?', p. 106.

Victorian funeral increasingly emphasised the solemnity and mourning rituals associated with death, attributes of the 'cult of death' largely confined to the financially well-off. The cult had a limited life because a reaction soon arose to the excessive extravagance and ritualised mourning. Jalland claims that substantial reform of funeral and mourning practices was achieved by 1875, with two funeral and mourning reform associations established in Britain. The Australian colonies soon had similar organisations, expressions of a trend that had already seen much progress.¹⁶ However, the cult of death lingered on, with a reduced influence, until century's end. World War I accelerated the move away from extravagant funerals and mortuary symbolism.

One of the earliest dated monuments in the Cemetery, a Norman-style headstone made by March Group & Co. Melbourne, contains this epitaph

Created by

William Laidlaw

As a tribute of affection

To his beloved wife

AGNES

BORN 20TH SEPTEMBER 1790

Died 12th February 1867

HAVING LIVED TOGETHER 58 YEARS

SHE PRECEDED HIM TO HER REST

WILLIAM LAIDLAW LIES HERE

BORN 20TH JANUARY 1785

DIED 6TH APRIL 1870

IN DEATH THEY ARE NOT DIVIDED

The last line was commonly used during the Victorian period, indicating a hope or conviction that loved ones would be reunited after death, most likely in heaven. In her study of babies and children who died between 1840 and 1918 Jalland remarks that, as the Christian faith gradually diminished

¹⁶ Pat Jalland, *Australian Ways of Death*, p. 114.

in strength from the 1870s, hopes of heavenly reunion assumed greater importance for the grieving survivors.¹⁷

A marble headstone surmounted by a cross displays this epitaph

In Affectionate Remembrance

Of

Charles William Williams

Born at Edgeware England

Oct 12th 1816

Died at Port Fairy April 26th 1890

Aged 73 years

When earth's songs have all been sung

Labor ended trials done

We will met again oh happy word

And be forever with the Lord

Also

Hannah

Wife of the above

Died Nov25th 1899

Aged 72 years

The 'reunited after death' theme usually extolls the bliss to be experienced in the heavenly paradise. The epitaph for Susannah Martha, who died in 1888, refers to her as "Not Lost, But Gone Before". The epitaph for the family of James Andrews who died in 1855, expresses the conviction of the "Sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection through our Lord Jesus Christ". Expressions such as these were an integral part of influential forces in Christianity at the time. James Andrews, born in County Meath, was one of the many British and Irish immigrants to the Australian colonies

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 72.

after 1840 and many of them brought strong religious convictions and customs.¹⁸ It included a rich Christian culture of death and mourning rituals, powerfully reinforced by the Evangelical movement in Protestantism and the spiritual revival in Catholicism.¹⁹ The first line of the Andrews epitaph, “Gloria in Excelsis Deo”, is part of the Ordinary of the Mass; the English translation forms part of the Church of England service for Holy Communion.²⁰ The Andrews family may have belonged to that Catholic spiritual revival. At the time there was a strong Christian belief that the soul was resurrected into eternal life. The verse in the Williams epitaph is an example of a strongly held belief, especially within the Evangelical movement, that the souls of the deserving dead ascended to heaven to meet loved ones and Jesus. Until the mid-nineteenth century the burial of corpses in a churchyard was a clear sign of the soul awaiting the day of resurrection.²¹ Burial in non-church cemeteries was an indication of the advance of secularisation. The poem in the epitaph for Thomas Jackson, who died in 1861 is

Long was my life, long is my rest
God took me home
When he thought it best,
Weep not for me oh children dear
I am not dead but sleeping here

There are many memorials in the cemetery, covering a long period of time, expressing the conviction that human life is transitory and is succeeded by a 'going home' to a heavenly realm. The line 'departed this life', a part of numerous epitaphs, indicates a belief that human life precedes another life. One example in the cemetery appears on an anthropomorphic-shaped headstone surmounted by a Celtic cross:

Gloria in Excelsis Dio
of your charity

18 Ibid, p.3.

19 Ibid.

20 *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, Fifteenth edition. Revised by Adrian Room, Cassell, 1996, p. 450.

21 Tony Walter, 'Secularisation', p. 177.

PRAY FOR THE REPOSE OF THE SOUL OF

JOHN REARDON

WH DEPARTED THIS LIFE

28TH APRIL 1878.

AGED 56 YEARS.

AND HIS BELOVED WIFE

GEORGANA JANE

WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE

9TH MAY 1887.

AGED 60 YEARS

ALSO THEIR CHILDREN

CHARLES J. & AMMIE M.

WHO DIED IN INFANCY

The Celtic cross suggests that John Reardon was probably a Catholic from Ireland. Interestingly, his wife has included the following lines

AN OLD CRIMEAN SOLDIER

ON WHOSE SOUL SWEET JESUS HAVE MERCY

Britain for a long time used many Irishmen to fight its foreign wars.

Not all epitaphs are concerned with religious beliefs; one marble memorial records the deaths of Hugh and Betsy Sloley, who may have been married although Betsy is not referred to as Hugh's wife, in 1884.

Sacred to the memory of

HUGH SLOLEY

DIED 29TH MAY 1884

AGED 74 YEARS

ALSO OF

BETSY SLOLEY

DIED 25TH DECEMBER 1884

AGED 71 YEARS

THE DAYS OF OUR AGE ARE THREE

SCORE YEARS AND TEN YET IS THEIR

STRENGTH BUT LABOR AND SORROW

SO SOON PASSETH IT AWAY

AND WE ARE GONE

The epitaph presents a view of human life as brief, pitiless and final, suggestive of pessimism.

There are several significant examples in the cemetery showing the impact on mortuary symbolism of the Victorian cult of death. One monument features a broken black marble column.

The epitaph on one side of the plinth reads

Erected In

Loving Remembrance

OF OUR DEAR PARENTS

MOTHER

ELIZABETH GOLDIE

WHO DIED OCT 11th 1872

AGED 45 YEARS

FATHER

JOHN GOLDIE

WHO DIED AUG 26th 1901

AGED 70 YEARS

On another side of the plinth is

ALSO OF

OUR DEAR SISTERS & BROTHER

CATHERINE GOLDIE

DIED IN SCOTLAND FEB. 1859

AGED 21 MONTHS

MARGARET

DIED SEPT. 1862, AGED 19 MONTHS

JOHN

DIED MAY 1864, AGED 17 MONTHS

The parents appear to have experienced the death of their baby daughter in Scotland before emigrating to Victoria where a young son and daughter died. Hence the broken column memorial, a symbol of lives ended early.

The headstone for William Broadbent, who died in 1856 aged 48 years, incorporates a figure in relief, seated perhaps on a sarcophagus and holding an anchor, symbolic of faith.²² On the upper part of a large Norman-style headstone, erected to commemorate members of the Andrews family (previously mentioned) is incised “Gloria in Excelsis Deo” above a simple cross in relief, with the letters IHS, the first two letters and the last letter of Jesus in Greek.²³ Many monuments in the cemetery display those three letters, sometimes in the form of a monogram.

Epitaphs from the nineteenth century and early twentieth century usually provide basic details about the deceased. Sometimes they incorporate verse with secular or sacred significance, often meant to convey advice or belief about the physical world and/or the purported heavenly world. Taken from the Greek word for 'over a tomb', the strict definition of epitaph is an inscription on a tomb but it often refers to a brief verse or appropriate commemoration of the deceased.²⁴ The epitaph for John Wild tells us that he was from Huddersfield in England and “departed this life” in 1873, aged 44 years. There is no mention of a wife but of

Cyrus James and Lucy Elvina

22 'Topic 4: grave-markers, Epitaphs and Symbolism', in *HIST333 Waking the Dead: Death, Burials and Memorials, Unit Handbook*, University of New South Wales, p. 60.

23 *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, p. 546. it seems to be a reference to Jesus or the cross as agents of salvation.

24 *Ibid*, p. 364.

who died in infancy

The epitaph includes the following verse

Leave this world without a tear

Save for the friends held so dear

To bear their sorrow Lord descend

And to the friendless prove a friend

Reference is made to “this world” and, indirectly, to another from which the Lord (Jesus) may descend to comfort friends of the deceased. It is somewhat unusual, therefore, in expressing concern for those who remain alive and not to an afterlife. Perhaps, in accord with the religious sentiments and dogmas of the time, the continued existence of a soul is accepted. Often, however, there was explicit mention of an afterlife, with reunions in heaven. Inscriptions on memorials from the Bible, hymns or poetry, Sarah Tarlow argues, increased during the nineteenth century in Britain, most implying the hope of an afterlife or reunion in heaven.²⁵ Jalland claims that differences between the Australian colonies, and also between those and Britain, were mostly eliminated from epitaphs and stones as headstones and epitaphs could be selected from catalogues.²⁶ It may explain why certain phrases and verses are repeated on memorials in the cemetery, such as “Not Lost, But Gone Before”. They were widely used in Britain as part of the Christian cult of death and transmitted to here where, it seems, the cult flourished between the 1830s and the 1880s.²⁷ Charles Williams, John Wild, and other immigrants buried at Port Fairy brought the culture of Britain and Ireland to Australia, including the culture of death. It could produce a warning to the living, as expressed in

Abijah John Brown

Who departed this life July 19th 4862

Aged 40 years

Watch for ye know not what hour yoyre

²⁵ See Pat Jalland, *Australian Ways of Death*, p. 122.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 68.

Lord doth come²⁸

Religion was an important aspect of the life of many people at the time, something to be taken seriously.

At the beginning of the twentieth century new grave sites were created in the cemetery, divided into four areas by denomination and costing one pound each. Initially, the Catholic compartment contained 224 sites but was significantly extended later. The Church of England compartment at first numbered 252 sites but was also significantly extended. The Methodist area initially had 112 graves and the Presbyterian the same number. Both were later moderately extended. The compartments, as designed, were spacious but as grave sites were occupied it became necessary to place additional graves at the boundaries between compartments. As a consequence, the grave identification scheme, using letters and numerals, is complicated and difficult to make sense of. One of the earliest memorials in the Catholic compartment reads, in part

Of your Charity
Pray for the Soul of
Elizabeth Alice Crotty
The Dearly Loved Wife of
John Crotty
WHO DIED JULY 26TH 1905
AGED 56 YEARS

The phrase “Pray for the Soul of” identifies the person commemorated as a Catholic. The Catholic church declares that prayers offered by the living can beneficially affect the soul of the deceased after death. Another memorial in the Catholic area features a white marble pedestal surmounted by a cross with a Jesus figure carved in high relief, and a Celtic cross at the front of the grave.

IHS

IN

²⁸ P Frazer Simons alleges that a mistake has not been made in recording the year of death as it was not meant to be 1862. It might be expected that a mistake would be detected and corrected. P Frazer Simons, *An Historical Graveyard: Some Early Records of Port Fairy Cemetery*, Dewitt Publications, 1979, p. 24.

Sad and loving

Memory of

MY DEAR HUSBAND

WILLIAM JAMES WALL

WHO DIED MAY 19th 1899

AGED 40 YEARS

May his soul rest in peace.

The Celtic cross has an epitaph that reads

'MY DARLING CHILDREN'

DIED IN 1897 AT AGE 41/2 YEARS AND 1896

AGED 7 YEARS AND 10 MONTHS.

As the nineteenth century was ending many infants were still dying, often of infectious diseases. It appears that the infant mortality rate, although falling from the 1880s, only declined significantly after 1904.²⁹

An impressive headstone in the Catholic compartment is of white marble with three crosses and a Celtic harp with a floral surround carved in low relief. The iron railing is topped with crosses. The epitaph is for “Catherine Jane, dearly loved wife of William Madden, who died April 23rd 1911.” Her given names are provided as her most important role was considered to be wife of the head of the family. A short verse is included

IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY

YOUR PRAYERS FOR HER EXTOLL

O' SACRED HEART OF JESUS

HAVE MERCY ON HER SOUL

The first line refers to the 'Mother of God' to whom Catholics pray. The 'Sacred Heart of Jesus' is a phrase often used in Catholic worship. Mary and Jesus are asked to treat kindly the soul of Catherine Jane, the latter being the central figure of the Catholic faith and intermediary between

²⁹ Pat Jalland, *Australian Ways of Death*, p. 69.

God and humans.³⁰ Mary is revered and claimed to be especially receptive to prayers.³¹ The Protestant churches proclaim that each person has a personal and unique relationship to God so that salvation cannot be influenced by prayer. Prayers for the souls of the dead are considered heretical because God judges the dead only on merit.³² As the twentieth century advanced there tended to be less of the traditional teachings of the Catholic church in epitaphs. On a double grave containing Many and Edward Scanlon (died 1930 and 1929) and their daughter (1960) the only religious symbolism is a stylised cross. By the 1960s there tends to be little to differentiate the graves of Catholic deceased from Protestant deceased.

The memorial epitaphs in the Church of England section often refer to peace and rest, although it is not specific to that denomination only. The Howden family epitaph reads

IN LOVING MEMORY

PEACE

PERFECT

PEACE

of

THOMAS HOWDEN

WHO ENTERED INTO REST

5th MAY 1921. AGED 71 YEARS.

“THE MEMORY OF THE JUST IS BLESSED”.

ALSO MARY A.E.

HIS BELOVED WIFE

ENTERED INTO REST

20th SEPT. 1935

AGED 74 YEARS

30 Harold Ter Blanche & Colin Parkes, 'Christianity', in Colin Parkes, Pittu Laungani & Bill Young (eds.), *Death and Bereavement Across Cultures*, Routledge, p. 136.

31 “From the beginning the Church has honoured the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them...so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God”. 'Part one, the profession of faith', in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, St Pauls, 1994, p. 268.

32 Harold Ter Blanche & Colin Parkes, 'Christianity', p. 139.

The epitaph for Lillian and Thomas Guyett concludes with “PEACE, PERFECT PEACE”, and various phrases appear in epitaphs in the Anglican compartment. There is “SAFE IN THE ARMS OF JESUS” and “THY WILL BE DONE” in both Anglican and Methodist areas. The theme of rest is restated in Berth Hallett's epitaph: “A PATIENT SUFFERER AT REST”. The word rest can be seen in religious and non-religious terms, perhaps a blissful eternity in heaven or a state of sleep without consciousness. The religious meaning is suggested on several memorials from the mid nineteenth century into the twentieth century: “ASLEEP IN JESUS” on Margaret Watson's memorial (died 1912); “So he giveth his beloved sleep” on the memorial to Janet Cameron, who died in 1915 and is buried with relatives under an impressive monument in the Presbyterian compartment. It features a granite column surmounted by an urn.

Historians say that a significant change occurred in attitudes to death and burial practices because of World War I and the subsequent influenza epidemic. Where Victorian and Edwardian people used epitaphs to express sentiments and beliefs, reflections on life, etc., from World War I they tend to be reserved, often giving only name, age and date of death.³³ After the war many standard tablets were erected in cemeteries in Australia by the Commonwealth government, showing the number, rank and unit of each dead serviceman.³⁴ More detail is provided in the epitaph to a dead soldier on an open book carved from marble and located in the Methodist section. The left side reads

In Loving Memory
of
Corpl B.J. EVANS
No 3143 58th BAT. A.I.F.
SECOND SON OF
J. & E. EVANS
WHO WAS KILLED IN FRANCE

³³ Graeme Griffin & Des Tobin, *In the Midst of Life*, p. 93.

³⁴ Celestina Sagazio, *Cemeteries: Our Heritage*, National Trust of Australia, 1995, p. 17.

4th FEB.1917.

AGED 23 YEARS.

AFTER 2 YEARS ACTIVE SERVICE.

The right side of the open book reads

A HERO HE LIVED.

A HERO HE FELL

THOUGH ONLY A LAD. HE

DID HIS PART WELL.

HE GAVE HIS LIFE FOR

A CAUSE THAT IS TRUE.

FIGHTING FOR EMPIRE.

FOR HOME AND FOR YOU.

The number of war casualties, with relatives unable to see bodies or graves, leads Beverley Raphael to suggest that the experience, in Australia and England, resulted in a model of grief that tended to stoicism, privacy and survival.³⁵ Epitaphs thereafter mostly refrained from excessive religious symbolism and biblical and literary references. Overall, they were simpler and less pretentious. In the 1920s the mass production of memorials meant that more people bought them so that aspect of class difference diminished.³⁶ And the 1930s depression resulted in more humble memorials, presumably with a corresponding simplicity in epitaphs.³⁷

Robert Nicol says that the World War I military cemetery, with simple, uniform memorials, neat rows and extensive lawn influenced Australian cemetery developments and that after World War II the increasing cost of labour provided incentive for simplicity.³⁸ In the early 1960s Port Fairy Cemetery laid out a a lawn area with monuments to be of low height to allow a uniform appearance

35 Beverley Raphael, 'Grief and Loss in Australian Society', in Allan Kellehear (ed.), *Death and Dying in Australia*, OUP, 2000, p. 119.

36 Ibid, p. 18.

37 Ibid.

38 Robert Nicol, 'Australian burial customs', in Allan Kellehear (ed.), *Death and Dying in Australia*, p. 100.

and ease of maintenance. The Catholic section (LR) has 183 graves, Church of England (LC) 161 graves, Presbyterian (LP) 138 graves and the Methodist (LM) 61 graves. The numbers indicate that the Catholic population of the Port Fairy area was probably the largest of the denominations. The earliest death recorded in the Catholic section is the following

RYAN
IN MEMORY OF
DANIEL JOSEPH
DIED 21-1-1961
ALSO JAMES RYAN
DIED 14th MAY 1977
AGED 44 YEARS

The simple white cross on the memorial indicates a continuing adherence to Christianity but in a subdued way. Many of the epitaphs on the memorials placed since the 1960s are restricted to providing name/s, and date of death. The Hockley memorial reads
in loving memory of

GEORGE HOCKLEY
LOVED HUSBAND OF RENE
DIED 6-9-1966. AGED 77 YEARS
RENE
DIED 29-8-1992
IN HER 94th YEAR
LOVING MOTHER AND NANA
RIP

As with many of the memorials of today the emphasis is on alleged loving family relationships.

In the 1980s another area was developed for lawn burials with strips of concrete, back to back in rows, on which fairly standardised monuments are fixed. Each grave may contain two bodies at

depths of seven and five feet. No distinction is made regarding the religious denomination, if any, of the people buried here. Tony Walker writes that there may be two significant aspects to growing secularisation in the twentieth century. One is the advance of science and medicine and the other is the decline of religion, in terms of belief and institutional power.³⁹ There has been a change from a situation in which religion was an important social force and science was somewhat peripheral, to one in which religion is separated from other institutions, including those that deal with the dead. For the individual, religious belief is now a personal matter and not usually an arbiter of his or her relationship to society, something that is either accepted or rejected.⁴⁰ That is, religion is now a matter of private faith, a situation that largely governs the modern way of death, including the content of epitaphs. The contemporary notion that people, even in death, should remain true to their character, is very different from the Victorian attitude to death which emphasised piety and conformity to religious precepts. Contemporary epitaphs are concerned to declare that the deceased is a 'loving' and 'loved' member of the family, as if the meaning of life is contained in close relationships. Or that personal interests are important, such as in the following

In Loving Memory

of

GRAHAM JOHN WOODRUP

26-12-1946 – 17-2-1992

LOVED HUSBAND OF HESTER AND LOVED

FATHER OF KATE AND JOHN.

THROUGH HIS LOVE OF CYCLING

HE INSPIRED OTHERS

The epitaph for Leon Finnigan refers to him as the “Dearly loved husband and soulmate of Debbie” and the headstone has a tractor and cow engraved on it, probably to indicate that he was a dairy farmer. Both the Woodrup and Finnigan headstones have an image of the deceased incorporated into

³⁹ Tony Walker, 'Secularisation', p. 177.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 179.

them, an increasingly popular feature of memorials and indicative of the desire to remember the dead person as the living person they once were.

The Port Fairy Public Cemetery is a valuable research source for local, and even national, history. It has been an interesting exercise to acquaint myself with some of its memorials and discover that epitaphs are pieces of history. I have concentrated more on the nineteenth and early twentieth century memorials because they provide more interest than more recent epitaphs that tend to be bland and similar in form and content. Probably the most important observation that I have made relates to the progressive secularisation that is reflected in the memorials in the cemetery.

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