



R.I.P

ROOKWOOD IN PROFILE

Newsletter of Friends of Rookwood Inc.

Volume 30 No. 1

ROOKWOOD CREMATORIUM TURNS

100



*Crematorium
1925*



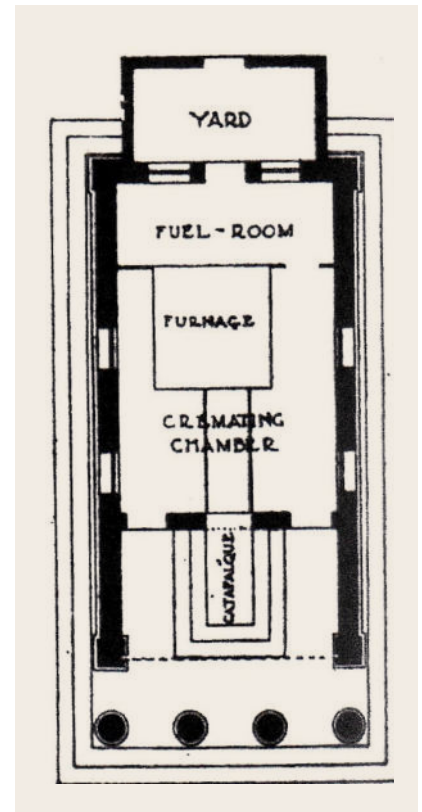
A view of the Crematorium, February 2025

Rookwood Crematorium Turns 100

May 28, 2025, will go down in Australian history as on that day, the General Crematorium at Rookwood will have been in operation for 100 years. It is the oldest still functioning crematorium in Australia.

The first cremation at Rookwood took place at 3pm on 28th May 1925 being that of Annie Elizabeth Silcocks, (Nee Swanger) whose funeral was conducted by Rev A. R. Ebbs of Manly in conjunction with Thomas Dixon Funerals. According to her death notice in the Sydney Morning Herald of 28 May 1925, Annie had died the previous day, late of Manly.

On the day of her cremation, the entire Rookwood facility consisted of no more than a cremating chamber with an imported English furnace, a fuel room, a yard and a temporary entrance.



Frank Bloomfield's 1924 design and floor plan for a simple crematorium.



Cremation Urn of Annie Silcocks

Annie has her place in history and the urn containing her ashes is located in the south chapel with a suitably inscribed plaque at its base.

One of the early 'pioneers' of cremation, was Rose Scott who died on 20 April 1925 before the crematorium was ready for use. In her will, she wished for her body to be cremated.

Her body was actually buried after her death and interred at Rookwood. She was later exhumed and then cremated on 26 August 1925 – being number 18 in the Cremation Register.

Rose was a renowned suffragette and the cousin of David Scott Mitchell a well-known book collector and major benefactor of the Mitchell Library of NSW.



Commemorative Plaque re the first Cremation at Rookwood

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R.I.P. ROOKWOOD IN PROFILE
Published by the Friends of Rookwood Inc.

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The Dixon Angels – March 2025



President's Report



This is the second edition of the new version of our RIP. We hope that you find it interesting. At the Committee meeting on 16th February, we discussed its

format and changed a few things. We also welcomed Corey Grosvenor to the Committee and wished her well.

In January and February we mainly had good weather which enabled us to successfully present two Twilight Tours. Our March Irish themed tour was also able to be held in good weather with most bookings being made via Eventbrite. Geoff Bovard has decided to 'resurrect' the Convict Heritage Tour which will be held in November. Other monthly tours will continue as per our program. See our schedule on page 8.

From time to time, we are able to open the Frazer Mausoleum for short periods of time for anyone that would like to inspect the restorations that were completed last year. Monitor our Facebook page for when the next opening will be held.

We decided to change the name 'Tour Guide' to 'Storyteller', as this is what we do! We are volunteers and all the money we raise is used to assist with restoration works in Rookwood. Encourage your friends and family to

join us on a tour and hear stories about our history and more.

I have spoken with Sach Killam about the conservation works that are underway in Rookwood Cemetery. Sach is the Stonemason – Heritage Specialist, Metropolitan Memoriam Parks. They include – Dr William Bland's headstone (CofE), William Vial's Urn and Headstone (Wesleyan), William Sanguilly's Headstone inscription (CofE), Safety Works in the Catholic Mortuary 1 and more! Repairs on the Dixon monument in the Independent Section was funded by the Family Trust. As well as stabilising and protecting the wings, a conservator completed the work to preserve the trumpet. Cleaning and mortaring work is also underway on this magnificent monument.

Mr Lee Squires, was able to acquire maps and information of the graves which were buried under the road when it was constructed between the railway line and the Cemetery. See story page 5.

Our Helping Hands Group has also commenced their yearly program. See Geoff's report later in this edition

It has been decided to hold our Members' Meeting on Saturday 20 September, 2025 at 2pm. More details will be in the next RIP.

Robyn Hawes, OAM

The header at the top of my report, Grapes and Vine – represents Jesus saying to his disciples 'I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me, you will bear much fruit.'

Thus spreading the work.

Rookwood Crematorium Turns 100

(continued from page 2)

Background

The Cremation Society of New South Wales was formed in 1908 to promote cremations and to assist in the development of crematoria across the state.

In 1916, the New South Wales Cremation Company Ltd was created. This was a commercial body designed to independently raise the funds to plan and build crematoria, freeing such developments from being dependent on state government funding.

The NSW Government Gazette of 26 July 1918 showed partial success was at hand when the government agreed to the Society's request and set aside a suitable crematorium site. An area of twelve acres, two roods and twelve perches was reserved (approximately 5 hectares), nearby to Rookwood Cemetery, though the actual site was later changed.

There was of course some opposition from the local Council and local residents - mainly about the site and the potential for lowering property prices and giving the area a bad name, even though it already had the largest cemetery! These issues were later resolved.

The outbreak of World War I put on hold the plans of both the Cremation Society of New South Wales and the New South Wales Cremation Company Ltd. However, activity to promote cremations and to build crematoria recommenced shortly after the conclusion of the War.



Joseph Maiden

With the war over, the plans pushed ahead. Joseph Maiden, the director of the Sydney Botanic Gardens, had volunteered to supervise the planting of trees and associated landscaping and by July 1919 they had commissioned local architect and cremationist Cyril Blacket to draw up a design.

This was all slowed down due to the influenza epidemic that was raging at the time.

By 1922, the Company had selected an architect and by 1923 a private company, Cremation Society of Australia Ltd, had been formed to promote cremations across the nation, and to raise funds for their development. Space within the Rookwood Necropolis was made available to the Cremation Society for the building of Australia's first such facility.

Things moved quickly and the Society was ready to begin building. Over 400 cremations had by that time been purchased in advance. The completed facility was complemented with beautiful art deco statues, classical iron work and other period features.



The three commemorative plaques of the pioneers of Cremation in NSW and the founder of the Cremation Society of Australia. Located in the Crematorium's columbarium



Cartoon from the Bulletin – Both an undertaker and a member of the Cremation Society vie to sign up a 'customer'.

To be continued in a later edition

From the Archives

RIP March 1995



Oral History of Rookwood

Friends of Rookwood recently visited 99-year-old Miss Amy Burton, Auburn's longest residing resident, at the Hume Nursing Home in Greenacre where she now lives. Miss Burton has a long association with Auburn

having lived there for 95 years, and in particular with Rookwood Necropolis.

Her father Aaron 'Jimmy' Burton was the ranger for the Anglican cemetery at Rookwood and on 23 July 1895 Amy was born at "The Lodge" or ranger's residence (now demolished) which was located at the northern end of William Drive, in the Necropolis grounds.

Miss Burton remained living at "The Lodge" until 1964 when her father died, at the age of 99.

Amy, then aged 69, and her sister Mabel moved to their father's original home at John Street, Lidcombe. This small timber workers cottage built by Mr Burton in 1876 is reported to be the oldest

house remaining in the district and is currently the subject of controversy as local residents endeavor to save it from demolition. Miss Burton can remember a time when 86 gardeners were employed at the Necropolis. She remembers the removal of the Mortuary railway station in 1958 and can tell the story of many other significant as well as day-to-day events in Rookwood's history.



The East Street Gates as shown on the front page of the December 2024 edition of RIP, were completed by Hossein Valamanesh.

Valamanesh was an Iranian-born, Australia-based artist whose works commented on the struggles of immigrants.

He completed these gates for Rookwood in 1993. The design represents 'no beginning, no end – depicting the transition from one life to another'.

The Bicentennial Transcription Project completed in 2024

Lee Squires

In September 1981 volunteers and members of the Society of Australian Genealogist (SAG) began the enormous task of transcribing the epitaphs of hundreds of thousands of monuments in Rookwood.

They began at the ruins of the Anglican trust's Manager's house in William Drive and soon had to overcome many challenges in viewing and recording inscriptions in time for the 1988 centenary.

One of the difficulties that was never overcome was that the northern boundary of the Necropolis which was shifted south in 1982 to accommodate an extension of Railway Street, Lidcombe. The fence cut off access to the northern parts of the original 200 acres of Haslem's Creek Cemetery appropriated in 1858. This included portions of six sections of buried ground as well as the infrastructure that served them.

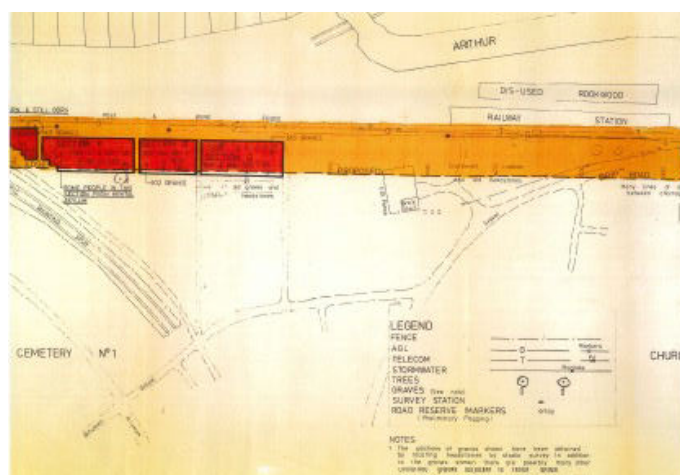
Auburn Council had commenced clearing the ground for the new road in 1981. This involved bulldozing grave markers into a heap near East Street. There was a hiatus when Council funding dried up. A public outcry arose when rail passengers saw graves had been disturbed.

Questions were raised by the National Trust as to how Rookwood was being managed.

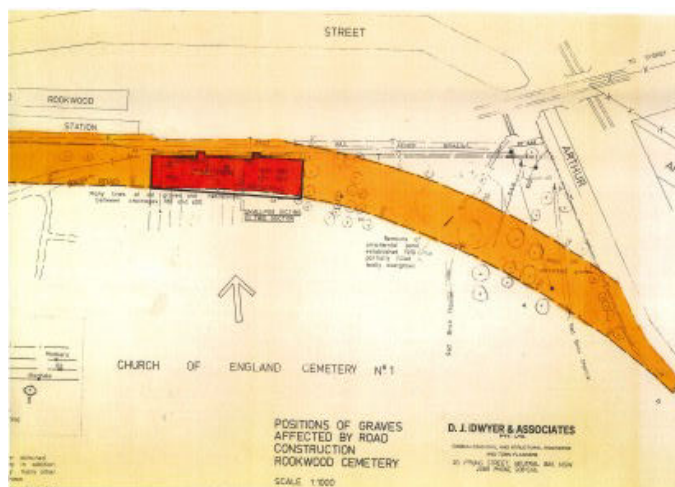
A report was called for from the appointed JCNT engineers, D.J. Dwyer & Associates, who in July 1979, provided plans and a register of affected graves.

This report was buried in trust files for decades until it was placed in the archive of the Joint Committee of Necropolis Trustees. There it lay until 2024 when a site survey could be made of the remnants of the lost cemetery sections that remain inside the Necropolis fence and an accurate tally made of the registers published in Dwyer's report.

The report revealed that 1965 graves are now safely covered by the concrete structure of Railway Street. They contain 2994 burials that include at least 906 infant graves. Their dates range from 1869 to 1939. Copies of the relevant impacted graves and associated maps have been provided to the two Trusts at Rookwood.



Map of Catholic Sections O, P and Q – showing impacted areas highlighted in red.



Map of Church of England Cemetery 1 – showing impacted area highlighted in red.

If people would like specific information on these years in these sections, please contact the relevant cemetery office see below

Rookwood General Cemetery (Anglican): (02) 8575 8100
Rookwood Catholic Cemetery: 1300 114 997

Mr Lee Squires was the former Executive Manager of the Joint Committee Necropolis Trustees Rookwood 1987-2011. He was also the Chair of the Cemetery Conservation Committee of the National Trust of Australia (NSAW) 2014-2023.

Helping Hands Happenings

Hello Friends of Rookwood

A new year of gardening has just begun! The Helping Hands team are looking forward to restarting our gardening program for 2025.

Our team will be focusing its attentions on the areas visited by the Friends' Sunday tours, continuing what we have done in previous years. In doing this, we work quite closely with both the Rookwood grounds team and the Rookwood heritage stonemasons. We've been doing this for many years with these good people and look forward to this continuing under the MMPLM banner.

To be a little more detailed; over the next month or so, we will likely be busy in Old Anglican sections S, 1 and 2 at the top of the Serpentine. Those areas are actually looking quite tidy at the moment, and we've been complimented by the Rookwood staff on this, which is great to hear. The team will be aiming to keep this up over the coming year. We'll also be working in the Old Methodist / Wesleyan and Old Presbyterian sections. By the time May and June comes around, it will be time for rose pruning and (possibly) planting in the two rose gardens we look after.

More than ever, we are looking for people to join us. Some of our team members are dealing with significant illnesses, and our thoughts go out to them. Others have not been able to return this year. The team is quite small (under ten people) at the moment.

So, if you are interested to help us for a couple of hours on the second and fourth Saturdays of the month between March and November (weather permitting), you would be very welcome. Just bring a few tools (gloves, garden spade, rake, pruning shears) and lots of enthusiasm. You'll also need a hat, sun lotion, appropriate clothing, sturdy footwear, drinking water, something to sit on and some lunch. The work is as hard as you want to make it, so you can put in as much effort as you wish. Some examples of what we do are removing rubbish and weeds from graves and gardens, weeding, gutter clearing, rose planting and pruning, and a lot of chat.

We meet at 9:30am in the Village Green car park opposite All Souls Chapel in Hawthorne Ave. If you are running late, contact Geoff on 0419 296 267 by phone or text to find where we are working.

We break for lunch at midday then work for an hour or two after lunch depending on the weather. At quitting time, we gather for a coffee and enjoy a chance to socialise. And remember that as a volunteer, you are not obliged to stay for the whole time or turn up every gardening day.

Our Gardening Days for the first half of 2025 are as follows, conditions permitting:

Saturday 8th & 22nd March

Saturday 12th & 26th April

Saturday 10th & 24th May

Saturday 14th & 28th June

Saturday 12th & 26th July

If you need any more information or have any questions please contact:

Geoff Bovard

0419 296 267

geoff.bovard@gmail.com

Until next time, best wishes from the Helping Hands.

Article by Geoff Bovard.

Office of Australian War Graves

Corey Weigold, Operations Manager NSW

The Office of Australian War Graves takes care of war cemeteries and war graves. They work in Australia, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. They also build and look after official Australian memorials overseas.

Over 12,000 Australian lives ended in their home country during the Second World War or as a result of their service during the First World War. Australian, Commonwealth and Allied war dead, civilian casualties and even two enemy military dead are buried in 72 Commonwealth war cemeteries and plots and over 1,900 civil cemeteries in Australia. The OAWG also maintains Cowra Japanese War Cemetery and Tatura German War Cemetery for their respective Governments.

Many Australian war cemeteries and graves are close to the sites of Second World War military bases and facilities and each plays a unique part in telling the story of Australia at war.

women of the Armed Forces whose remains were cremated appear on the NSW Cremation Memorial.

Among those interred within the Sydney War Cemetery are the remains of nine Vietnam veterans who were re-interred there in June 2016 after having been repatriated from British Cemeteries in Malaya.

Adjacent to these servicemen is the grave of Sergeant Brett M Wood who died on 23 May 2011. He was serving with the Special Operations Task Force in Afghanistan when he was tragically killed in action.

The cemetery was established by the military authorities in 1942 as the last resting place of servicemen and women who gave their lives during the Second World War. It contains mainly the graves of those who died in the Concord Military Hospital because of sickness, accident or injuries sustained in operational areas.



Stone of Remembrance – Sydney War Cemetery, Rookwood. Inscription reads 'Their Name Liveth For Evermore'

In New South Wales Sydney War Cemetery, Memorial to the Missing and the NSW Cremation Memorial

Located within the Rookwood Necropolis, Sydney War Cemetery is Australia's largest war cemetery and the only Australian war cemetery that has a Stone of Remembrance.

Although Stones of Remembrance are normally limited to war cemeteries with more than 1,000 graves, this stone remains at this slightly smaller cemetery due to shipping challenges (it was intended for Ambon War Cemetery in Indonesia).

Sydney War Cemetery contains 744 war graves, including 33 sailors, 499 soldiers and 86 airmen of the Australian Forces; 85 sailors, 20 soldiers, 16 airmen and one Merchant Navy sailor of the UK Forces; one sailor and one airman of the NZ Forces; and one French sailor and one civilian (died while in employment of the Admiralty). The Sydney Memorial to the Missing, honours 741 dead. A further 199 names of men and

The UK casualties died as Prisoners of War held by Japanese forces and were cremated. After the war, the Army Graves Service arranged for their ashes to be brought by HMAS Newfoundland to Sydney for interment. The cemetery was taken over by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in December 1946.

Sydney War Cemetery was entered on the Register of the National Estate on 21 October 1986.



Photo courtesy of Margaret Warn

To be continued in a later edition

Heritage & Themed Tours For 2025

ALL these tours are walking tours and depart from the grassed area near St Michael the Archangel Chapel (on the left, just off Necropolis Drive). Enter the cemetery via the gate at the corner of Victoria and East Streets, Lidcombe.

They are all separate tours and **are subject to change without notice.**

Costs - All Tours, per person, per tour:

- \$15 non-members
- \$10 per members.
- \$5 Children 11-16 years accompanied by an adult

We are volunteers, and ALL money raised assists with cemetery restoration projects.

4 May	10am	<i>Heritage Walk - Part 1</i>
1 June	10am	<i>Heritage Walk - Part 2</i>
6 July	10am	<i>Twilight Tour - Our popular evening Twilight tour conducted in full daylight.</i>
3 August	10am	<i>Ships and Shipwrecks</i>
7 September	10am	<i>Introduction to Rookwood</i>
5 October	10am	<i>Murder and Mayhem</i>
2 November	10am	<i>Our Convict Heritage</i>

Heritage Walk

A general introductory tour of some of the heritage areas of Rookwood

Ships and Shipwrecks

In the 19th Century, hundreds of thousands of convicts and immigrants made the always hazardous voyage at a time when an average of one ship a week was lost in Australian waters. Well into the 20th century, ocean travel was the only way in and out of Australia. Headstones at Rookwood bring to mind some of these journeys and disasters. Names of famous and less-known wrecks are recorded on many family monuments. Hear too about the early years of the Australian Navy and the Sydney Squadron of the Royal Navy on the Australia Station.

Membership Application Form

Please complete the application details below.

Note: Our membership year is based on a financial year - there are no pro-rata membership rates.

I / We wish to join the Friends of Rookwood Inc.

Title _____ First Name _____

Last Name _____

Address _____

Contact Phone No _____

Email _____

Please note that your email address will be used for notices about meetings, Friends' activities and the quarterly newsletter.

Schedule of Membership Fees

	Yearly		
Individual	\$20.00		
Household	\$25.00		
Corporate	\$30.00		
Membership Total	\$		
Donation (Most Welcome)	\$		
TOTAL	\$		

Please circle your method of payment.

Cash - Cheque/Money Order* - Direct Deposit

*Cheques/money orders should be made payable to:
Friends of Rookwood Inc.

Direct Deposit details#: Westpac, Miranda –
BSB No. **032-059** Account No. **259785**.

#When making a direct deposit, please add your name.