



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in November 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

The low undulating grassed sandhills, mature trees, and remaining monuments of *Old Busselton Cemetery* are valued by the community as an aesthetically pleasing cultural landscape. (Criterion 1.1)

A number of the remaining headstones and monuments produced by local and interstate monumental masons are aesthetically significant as examples of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Australian memorial design and carving. (Criterion 1.2)

In its coastal location, the cemetery has aesthetic value as a park-like open space in the townscape of Busselton, and as part of a zone of public open space including adjacent recreational areas and sportsgrounds. (Criteria 1.3, 1.4)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Old Busselton Cemetery is historically important for its association with the first years of European settlement in the local area and in Western Australia. (Criterion 2.1)

As the 'burial ground' identified in the first town plans of Busselton, it is a significant element in the history and growth of the town. (Criterion 2.2)

The Cemetery has historic value as a record and burial place of many early European settlers including members of the Bunbury, Curtis, Forrest, Killerby, Layman, Yelverton and other families prominent in the early history of the area and Western Australia. (Criterion 2.3)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

All cemeteries have research and teaching value, and have potential archaeological value in that they are sites which, if it was ever appropriate

* For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, Richard; Irving, Robert and Reynolds, Peter *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.

or necessary to excavate, can yield information on human health and social customs in past times. (Criteria 3.1, 3.2)

11. 4. SOCIAL VALUE

Old Busselton Cemetery is highly valued by the community for social, cultural, educational and religious reasons, and this high level of interest is reflected in the community's continuous efforts over the years to maintain and interpret the place. (Criterion 4.1)

As part of the town of Busselton from its earliest years, and the burial place of several hundred persons who died between c. 1850 and 1932, many of whom have descendants still living locally, the Cemetery makes an important contribution to the community's sense of place. (Criterion 4.2)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1. RARITY

Despite modification and loss, *Old Busselton Cemetery* retains a distinctive and unusual character as a Victorian-era cemetery which followed landscape contours rather than being established on a flat area. (Criterion 5.1)

All cemeteries have rarity value, and in fact uniqueness, at the personal level inasmuch as human individuals generally have only one burial place and a gravestone is the only monument associated with many individuals. (Criterion 5.1)

Through particular representations of aspects of nineteenth-century religious doctrine and attitudes to death in the imagery of the monumental masonry, the place provides evidence of mourning customs no longer practised or extremely rare in contemporary society. (Criterion 5.2)

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

Old Busselton Cemetery demonstrates characteristic Australian burial practices of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and demonstrates the esteem in which communities hold their cemeteries. (Criterion 6.2)

12.3 CONDITION

The aesthetic and historic value of *Old Busselton Cemetery* has survived despite the loss of many monuments due to vandalism, decay and some ill-informed management practices. Its coastal location has amplified the usual climatic elements which cause deterioration in all cemeteries and exposed monuments. Late twentieth-century management practices have attempted to eliminate any air of neglect and preserve certain elements, such as fragments of broken headstones, but in the process have diminished the integrity and authenticity of the place. Work in the 1980-90s included a new 'memorial gate' entrance, perimeter walling, and site interpretation. These works were aimed at further augmenting community interest in, and ownership of, the place and may be successful in discouraging vandalism.

12.4 INTEGRITY

The place has a high degree of integrity because, although burials ceased in 1932, it has continued in its original and intended use as a cemetery. The original rectangular shape of the cemetery was altered when a small part of the area designated 'Burial Ground' on the 1839 and 1844 town plans was excised to form part of a caravan park. Loss of fabric, due to exposure to the elements and management practices which aim to keep the place tidy, has diminished its integrity but it remains viable in its present role as a disused cemetery. Further loss of integrity was avoided when the 1981 proposals to create a modern columbarium did not proceed. Due to the loss of many monuments, the majority of the graves are unmarked and

this diminishes its informative value. There is very limited scope for restoring lost components of the fabric, but site interpretation installed in the 1990s assists in facilitating public and visitor understanding of the place.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

The place has a moderate degree of authenticity because, although extant fabric in the form of surviving monuments is in generally good condition, it suffers from the loss of context due to the disappearance of most of the monuments and gravesite fittings.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The supporting evidence was compiled by the Research Institute for Cultural Heritage, Curtin University. The documentary evidence has been compiled by Donna Houston and Andrew Pittaway, Historians. The physical evidence has been compiled by Professor David Dolan, Heritage Manager.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Old Busselton Cemetery was established in the 1840s on the edge of the town of Busselton. It was first planned in 1839 and with the growth of population and spread of the town's boundaries, the cemetery has become one of several open public spaces within the built-up area of Busselton. Burials ceased in the early 1930s by which time over 250 documented interments had taken place.

European settlement of the Vasse region began with the arrival of the Bussell, Molloy and Turner families on the *Warrior* at the Swan River in March 1830. Due to the limited amount of land available near the Swan, these families were encouraged to take up land at Augusta which had been favourably reported on by Stirling. The settlers arrived at Augusta on 3 May 1830 and were immediately faced with difficulties. They experienced problems with clearing the heavily timbered land and since their only means of communication was via irregular ship services, they often found themselves lacking in essential supplies.

Early in 1833, John Bussell set out on foot from Augusta in search of better land. It was on this expedition that he found a cow grazing on the banks of the Vasse River and, believing it to be one which had strayed from his Augusta property, subsequently named the spot *Cattle Chosen*. The land at the Vasse provided good pasture with its relatively open land which was probably the result of fire-stick farming practised by local Aborigines. In late 1833 John Bussell transferred his land grant at Augusta to the Vasse and in 1834 settled in the district at *Cattle Chosen*, with his family. The Bussells were accompanied by several other families who had originally settled in Augusta and transferred their land grants to the Vasse. These included the Turner family, George Layman (who settled at Wonnerup along the Sabina River), Elijah Dawson (Marybrook) Colonel John Molloy (Fairlawn) and Henry and James Chapman.

The town of Busselton was proclaimed in 1832. The 'burial ground' is included in an 1839 plan of Busselton, but was not officially proclaimed a cemetery until 1856¹. Local tradition, as expressed in on-site signage, has the cemetery established in 1847, but the exact date of the first interment is unknown. The Western Australian Cemetery Records show the first burial as Alfred Smith, aged eleven, in 1864, but the oldest grave identified in 1996 research (by Marie Pavy and Leanne Riordan) was Henry John Yelverton who died in 1854, and it seems certain that his was not in fact the first burial. What is significant is that this is the original burial place for Busselton and the surrounding district, and was in use from the first years of European settlement.

¹ WA Government Gazette, 5 August 1856, p. 620.
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Among the more than 250 people buried in the Cemetery over the near-century of its use were many members of families closely associated with the founding and growth of the town and district. Surnames which recur include Abbey, Armstrong, Barker, Barnard, Bovell, Bunbury, Bussell, Chamirion, Cross, Curtis, Dawson, Forrest, Guerin, Guerrier, Hall, Heppingstone, Isaacs, Killerby, Layman, Locke, Pries, Quirk, Reilly, Rose, Scott, Watling, Williams and Yelverton.

Early cemetery sites often proved unsatisfactory due to their proximity to growing towns and water supplies, and in 1900 the Busselton Board of Health requested the closure of the Cemetery because of the high water table.² Control of the Cemetery lay with the State Government and it was not until a site at Nannup Road was proclaimed in 1928³, that burials in *Old Busselton Cemetery* were limited to 'reunions' in family plots. A meeting held by the Executive Council on 22 February 1933 decided upon the closure of Busselton Cemetery:

His Excellency the Lt Governor and Administrator, by and with the advice and consent of the Executive Council, doth hereby direct that, from and after the 9th day of June 1933, burials within the limits of the Public Cemetery and Burial Grounds at Busselton herein mentioned, shall be wholly discontinued. L.E. Shapcott Clerk of the Council.⁴

Some ashes still continued to be interred, and the last event recorded by Pavy and Riordan relates to Sarah Elizabeth Killerby in 1943.

In 1944, the Western Australian Parliament passed the *Busselton Cemetery Act* which vested the cemetery in the local government authority as a disused burial ground.

Strength of community interest in the cemetery was shown in 1961 when a proposal to abandon it failed after a public meeting was called to express opposition to the idea.⁵

In 1981, the Busselton Shire Council announced a proposal, 'to develop a long-term plan to turn the pioneer cemetery... into memorial gardens.'⁶ Railway tracks leading to the jetty had been laid on the town side of the Cemetery and although no longer in use by this time, they were considered to improve the attractiveness of the site as a park.

The local newspaper report stated that 'the gardens will be used as the final resting place for the ashes of people who are cremated' because of problems establishing a memorial garden at the new cemetery. The Council's desire 'to have the headstones in the pioneer cemetery relocated into one area'⁷ is reminiscent of schemes authorised by the New South Wales *Conversion of Cemeteries Act* of 1974 which has permitted the destruction of integrity of many old cemeteries in that State and the creation of parks. This proposed official vandalism did not proceed at Busselton.

Margaret A. Feilman and Partners included the Cemetery in the *Busselton Historical Survey* in 1977. Further evidence of community interest and

² On-site interpretative information.

³ *WA Government Gazette*, Vol. 2 1928, p. 1976; 7 September 1928.

⁴ *WA Government Gazette* Vol. 1 1933, p. 291; 24 February 1933.

⁵ *South Western News*, 15 June 1961.

⁶ *Busselton Margaret River Times* 10 September 1981.

⁷ *ibid.*

research into the value of the Cemetery was provided in 1982, when K. F. Stewart compiled an annotated list from the 207 legible headstones.⁸ Stewart also identified fourteen graves with missing or illegible headstones and 45 unmarked wooden crosses. Another survey of *Old Busselton Cemetery* was conducted in 1996, when Marie Pavy and Leanne Riordan researched and compiled the 'Pioneer Cemetery Inventory'.

13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Over 250 identified graves are located within *Old Busselton Cemetery* which consists of just over one hectare of undulating grassed coastal sandhills. There are a number of mature trees but it is not clear how many of these were deliberately planted, as any pattern of paths and plantings has disappeared and many headstones and gravesite borders and fittings have been lost to vandalism, decay and tidying-up. Many of the graves are now unmarked, and indeed undetectable to the naked eye. In winter when grass is green, the predominant effect is of a park-like landscape dotted with headstones. This is the result of various active and passive changes over the years since c. 1930, which have created a cultural landscape markedly different in appearance from the place during, and soon after if was an operating cemetery. Up until that time, headstones and gravesites were everywhere and their number and layout dominated the scene.

All signage is of recent origin, as in the 1980s-90s, the Municipality and community groups have attempted to upgrade the condition of the Cemetery. In addition to modern walling, it has a new 'memorial gate' entrance, interpretative material supplied by the Lions Club and exterior signage designating it 'Pioneer Cemetery Est. 1847'.

The monuments in the Cemetery are the chief and most accessible element of the physical evidence and these are also documents of individual lives and the local community. Headstones in *Old Busselton Cemetery* commemorate people who reached all ages, from babies and children to a batch of octogenarians and a couple of nonagenarians, all trumped by Maria Locke who died at 96 in 1894.

All cemeteries are important as records of past lives and deaths, and among those resting in the *Old Busselton Cemetery* are men killed in farming, work and road accidents, a young soldier and an old lady who drowned. Many young men killed in Egypt and other theatres during World War I are also memorialised in *Old Busselton Cemetery*. Inscriptions reveal that the first generation of immigrant European settlers in the area came from a range of places of origin including London, Leeds, Surrey, Manchester, Somerset and Norfolk in England and Mallow, Tipperary and Kerry in Ireland.

The headstones themselves vary from plain to elaborate, and it is notable that a number of them were produced as far away as Adelaide. Although there are no imposing tombs or very large monuments, the surviving headstones are good and typical examples of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century monumental masonry, and incorporate a range of

⁸ Some of these were irreparably damaged or removed between 1982 and 1997.

traditional Christian and specifically Victorian-era funerary images. These include the Cross and 'IHS' expressing faith in resurrection, anchors representing the security the believer finds in faith, urns which are associated with funeral rites in many different societies and religions and which embody a neo-classical element, clasping hands expressing the hope of reunion in the afterlife, and flowers symbolising love, living energy and the beauty of divine creation.

13.3 REFERENCES

Marie Pavy and Leeane Riordan, 'Pioneer Cemetery Inventory', August 1996. Held by Shire of Busselton.

K. F. Stewart 'Busselton Cemetery (Old)' unpublished ms, Battye Library.

13.4 FURTHER RESEARCH

The opportunity exists for further research on people buried in the cemetery, and also to locate early photographs of the place which may exist in family albums.