



A.W. McCORMICK

FRIENDS of  
BOLTON STREET  
CEMETERY INCORPORATED  
PO BOX 2546 WELLINGTON

---

NEWSLETTER NO.30 JUNE 1990

---

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

MONDAY 9 JULY 1990

ST ANDREWS ON THE TERRACE

ST ANDREWS LOUNGE AT 8 PM

Our speaker at the AGM will be Margaret Allington, historian of Bolton Street Cemetery, who will give an illustrated talk on the cemetery past and present.

This will be a talk not to be missed. It is some years since Margaret spoke to the Friends on the cemetery. Even if you already know something about the cemetery, you are certain to learn more about this always fascinating place.

AGENDA - AGM 1990

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of the 1989 Annual General Meeting
3. Matters arising from the minutes
4. Chairman's report
5. Treasurer's report and financial statement
6. WCC Parks and Recreation Department report
7. Election of committee
8. Election of auditor
9. Address by Margaret Allington

JOSEPH SILBERY, 1851-1947

-by Nick Perrin

Despite the large numbers of extant memorials, it should not be forgotten that there are an even larger number of unmarked burials. This is a brief note on one of those.

To quote from "The Evening Post," Wellington, New Zealand, Thursday 31st March 1887:-

-----  
"The remains of the late Joseph Silbery, who was for some years a member of the Wellington Naval Artillery, were interred with military honours yesterday afternoon. The coffin was mounted on a gun carriage and covered with a Union Jack, and was drawn by a detachment of blue jackets. In addition to the deceased's late comrades, representatives of several of the other volunteer corps paid the last tribute of respect. The mournful cortege was headed by the Garrison Band, under Bandmaster Cimino, which played appropriately en route to the cemetery."

-----  
Joseph Silbery had arrived in Wellington on 2nd February 1874 assisted immigrant on the "Ocean Mail" which left London on 13th November 1873 (Plymouth on 15th November) This ship was wrecked off the Chathams in 1876. Joseph was accompanied by his wife Emily and son William aged 8 months. He was listed as a 29 year old carpenter from the county of Lancashire, but when he died at Wellington Hospital on 26th March 1887, he was reputed to be 36, so he was born in Liverpool, either in 1844 or 1851.

His father, Christopher, was a Master Mariner, and Joseph became a ship's carpenter and did a lot of travelling, following his uncle James Albert Silbery, who had run away to sea, to New Zealand. He also spent some time in Australia, and also Fiji some time between 1886 and 1880 (apparently involved in mining, and reputedly straining his heart there, which later killed him). Joseph and Emily's children were born in Palmerston North (1875), Petone (1876), Sydney (1881 and 1884) and Petone and Wellington (from 1886).

Joseph's time with the Wellington Naval Artillery Volunteers must have been about 1879 (when the volunteers were formed) until 1880/81 when he took the whole family to Sydney, and probably after 1884 as well, but he was an invalid with a weak heart by then. These volunteers manned guns around Wellington Harbour and practised gunnery so they would be ready to repel the expected Russian invasion that never came. They were originally intended to serve afloat, but apparently never did. Wellington did possess one spar torpedo boat, but this lethal device was manned by the regulars.

Torpedoes then were not the motorised exploding "fish" that we understand by the word today, but was a tube of explosives dangling from a long pole at the front of a fast boat which was intended to ram the enemy vessel and explode the torpedo against its side below the water line. As David McGill suggests in his book "Pioneers of Port Nicholson", it was 'possibly as dangerous to the firer as fired upon.' Indeed, the victim of an accident with one such

torpedo (as it says on his headstone) is buried in the cemetery a few metres from Harry Holland.

In 1884 there was a spate of fort building to house the guns, and some of these are still visible today (e.g. Fort Ballance on the Miramar Peninsula). The construction of these forts continued on and off until 1941 (Wright's Hill), and they were all declared obsolete in 1957.

Joseph and Emily had 8 or 9 children and about 34 grandchildren. There are large numbers of living descendants today. Emily died in 1918 and is buried at Taita, while Joseph was buried at Bolton St in a plot adjacent to an infant son who died in 1880. There is no memorial, and no record of the plot location. Apart from their death certificates, their only record is on a card in the Karori sexton's files for Joseph "Silverry", and George Albert "Silberg". The latter is an ironical mis-spelling, because "Silbery" is the anglicised form of the original Swedish "Silberg" - a change dating from a few generations before Joseph.

A final quote from the same issue of "The Evening Post" that carried the account of Joseph's funeral provides an interesting perspective on Wellington of the 1880's:-

-----

"The vital statistics for the city for the month of March are as follows:- Births, 141; Deaths, 74; Marriages, 34."

-----

If these statistics are representative, then the town must have been growing rapidly with births at twice the rate of deaths. It also reveals there must have been around two to three funerals every day, and consequently probably at least 2 burials a day in Bolton St/Sydney St, as the Anglican and Public sections were then known. Roman Catholics had their own cemetery in Mount St.

-----



Photograph of Joseph Silbery by Clifton Galleries, Willis St, Wellington. As Joseph was in the Merchant Marine as a ship's carpenter, it is unlikely his uniform would have included the sword he is wearing here. His uniform is therefore probably that of the Wellington Naval Artillery Volunteers.