

Friends of Bolton Street Memorial Park



FRIENDS of
BOLTON STREET
CEMETERY INCORPORATED
PO BOX 2336 WELLINGTON

NEWSLETTER NO. 32 MAY 1991

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

MONDAY 10 JUNE 1991

ST ANDREWS ON THE TERRACE

ST ANDREWS LOUNGE AT 8.00 PM

Our speaker at the AGM will be Tony Dreaver, historian, who will speak about five related Wellington families buried in Bolton Street Cemetery. This will be an interesting piece of social history.

AGENDA - AGM 1991

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of the 1990 Annual General Meeting
3. Matters arising from the minutes
4. Chairperson'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 Tony Dreaver

BOLTON STREET MEMORIAL PARK

THE EARLIEST HEADSTONE

The earliest headstone surviving from the Bolton Street Cemetery is taken to be the marble memorial that once marked the grave of William Rufus Tyrrell who died on 23 September 1841.* Its inscription, very worn after 150 years, many of them spent lying out of sight under ever deepening mulch, has been blackened in recent years, and the stone is now scrubbed regularly to keep it clear of moss. It reads:

BENEATH THIS STONE REST THE REMAINS OF WILLIAM RUFUS TYRRELL
ESQ., LATE OF LONDON, WHO DIED ON THE 23RD OF SEPTEMBER 1841 IN
THE 23RD YEAR OF HIS LIFE

The original plot number is not known, but the grave, disinterred for the motorway, was probably in the area to the north of the chapel. The stone, placed with the rejects during dismantling because it was thought to be illegible, is now reinstated at the north-west corner of the Early Settlers' Memorial Lawn, grid I14:1 on Parks Department map B217.

There is another stone that appears to pre-date Tyrrell's. A broken slate memorial, originally in the Church of England cemetery but removed in the path of the motorway was reinstated flat on the ground at grid I15:2 where it is frequently obscured by leaves. It records the death of John Pearce and is inscribed:

THIS STONE IS ERECTED BY THE AFFECTIONATE WIDOW OF THE LATE JOHN
PEARCE LATE OF BIRMINGHAM WHO WAS ONE OF THE EIGHT UNFORTUNATELY
DROWNED THE 26 DAY OF AUGUST 1841 AGED [41] YEARS [there follows
a verse which is partly obliterated by the crack down the middle
of the stone.]

The date, 26 August 1841, is a mistake; it should be 25 August 1840. The accident, which took place at Petone beach and which was reported in the New Zealand Gazette and Wellington Spectator of 29 August 1840, claimed eight lives, and according to the report, all the victims were buried at Petone on 28 August.

Celia and Cecil Manson, in their book Curtain-raiser to a Colony (1962), assume that Pearce was buried in the Bolton Street Cemetery, no doubt because of the existence of the slate memorial, but this may not have been so. Not only does the newspaper of August 1840 state otherwise, but the cemetery reserve was not approved for burials until August 1841, that is, a year after the accident. The earliest map of the Church of England cemetery does not include the name of PEARCE in the block near the Bolton Street boundary where the stone was eventually erected on plot Q616. It is of course possible that Pearce's body was reinterred in the Bolton Street Cemetery once the cemetery had opened, but to have predated Tyrrell's burial, the reinterment would have had to take place between August 1841 and 23 September 1841, and proof that this happened may yet be forthcoming.

The sexton's disinterment diary for 2 May 1969 records that three remains were found in plot 0616. It seems that the couple, who were passengers on the Duke of Roxburgh where the name was spelt PIERCE, had no children when they arrived in New Zealand, but Mrs Pearce may have remarried and had descendants. A Pearce infant (died 1886) and an E.N. Pierce (died 1888) appear in the burial list for the Church cemetery but without plot numbers so there is no reason to link them with John Pearce.

Headstones recording deaths of the 1840s and 1850s are very few and were often erected by the family at a later date. No memorial has survived for the first burial, which according to those alive in 1843, was a child named Sarah Susans who died in 1841 and was buried by the Revd John McFarlane. Her name is recorded in the St Paul's burial register. Tyrrell's stone was probably sent out to New Zealand by his family in England and the wording makes it clear that it lay on his grave. The wording on the Pearce stone on the other hand, with its incorrect date, together with the absence of the name on plot 0516 on the earliest map, suggest that the stone was not erected until some years after his death.

In the absence at present of any firm evidence that Pearce's remains lay in the Bolton Street Cemetery, the TYRRELL stone can be taken to be the earliest surviving memorial from a grave.

M.H.A.
April 1991

*An essay on Tyrrell by A.W. McCormick appeared in Newsletter No. 20 (May 1986) of the Friends of Bolton Street Cemetery.