

CEMETERY.

Surveyor Galloway surveyed and marked out the general cemetery at Armidale in July and September 1850. The first recorded cemetery was located on the north eastern side of the block where the Armidale City Public School is now located. No burial records have been located of this cemetery and on 2 April 1859 the *Armidale Express* noted 'the evils resulting from the practice of overcrowding ... are so perceptible, particularly to parties resident in the neighbourhood'. It appears that it ceased use sometime in the early 1860s. The *Armidale Express*, 10 May 1895, reported the exhumation of a 'Robert Mulligan, died 22 February 1860, aged 72 years' from the old cemetery when remains were moved to the present cemetery.

A new cemetery was approved by the state government in 1861 and dedicated on 2 July 1863. It was located on the Gostwyck Road and is still in use today. Because of difficulties in reaching the new cemetery particularly during wet weather, alternative sites were suggested. One alternative site was located on the western boundary of Armidale near Golgotha Street, but this site was apparently never dedicated. The correspondent in the *Armidale Express*, 9 October 1967 commented: 'There is no record of burial there and this cemetery seems to have existed only as a few short lines on the 1863 map of the town'.

James Henry Turner forwarded a petition in April 1864 asking council 'take under their notice the state of the old cemetery'¹ because some of the old fencing had been knocked down and stock were breaking down palings around graves. Council decided the petition would receive earnest attention. In July 1870, the council improvement committee recommended that the Police Inspector Brown direct officers to inspect the old cemetery to catch persons destroying fences and graveyards. A letter was received in September from the Public Lands Department advising council the old cemetery in Brown Street was gazetted as vested in a corporate body.

The inspector of nuisances drew attention in September 1876 to the disgraceful state of the fence around the graveyard but the matter was referred to the Attorney-General as council had no power over it. Twelve months later an application was made to the government to re-fence and improve the cemetery. A further twelve months passed and it was not until September 1878 that the town clerk again wrote to the government through Mr Terry to have the old cemetery fenced and put in order. The Department of Lands made available £50 in November for re-fencing the cemetery. Council called tenders for a two wire and baton fence in January 1879. Charles Forster's tender for £38 12s for fencing the cemetery was accepted in February and he was given three months to complete the work. The balance of money from the £50 was used to paint the fence.

¹ Council minutes, 25 April 1864.

The *Armidale Express*, 4 July 1857 referred to the stone quarries near the new cemetery. The present Armidale cemetery along the old Gostwyck Road was approved in 1861 and allotments 1 to and 7 were dedicated on 2 July 1863. Substantial additions to the cemetery were added when allotments 5a, 6 and 7a were gazetted on 28 June 1890. This extension involved seven acres and twelve perches. Reserves No. 11809, No. 11810 and No. 11811 were also set aside for a plantation on the eastern, southern and western boundaries on 28 June 1890. A further two roods addition was made on 2 August 1902 and one rood on 22 November. Further extensions for allotments 1 and 2 were made on 24 May 1935. This was followed by more additions on 19 June 1937 and provision was then made for Seventh Day Adventists, Baptists and Other Denominations.²

By April 1864 the public had contributed over £30 towards erecting a culvert on the road to the new cemetery but the Attorney General informed council that the amount could not be supplemented by the government. Not to be deterred, the council improvement committee adopted specifications for tenders for the culvert and road between the town and cemetery and tenders for the culvert in Dangar Street were called in May. Thomas Mitchell and Henry Rose won the tender to complete the work in ten weeks.

Ald. Schmidt moved that the government be asked 'to fence in the general cemetery'³ in September 1864 and in the same month racial intolerance appeared when concern was expressed over the burial of Blacks and Chinamen in the cemetery. The Department of Lands informed council that fencing for the general cemetery would be provided in the 1865 estimates and £80 was 'appropriated for the fencing'⁴ in October. The tender of Mr House was accepted in November and by March 1866 'the cemetery had been cleared' with all the logs drawn off and 'most of the holes filled'.⁵ The fencing was completed in April 1866 and a separate tender for gates was prepared. In May the council overseer was engaged in laying out the cemetery in walks and plots and the gates were completed and painted in June by Thomas Sheratt for £19 10s.

The Catholic section of the new cemetery was consecrated in May 1891 and the *Armidale Express*, 18 September reported:

for some time past, the R.C. Cemetery has been undergoing improvements, under the direction of Bro. Francis, who has had the grounds neatly laid out and choice pines and shrubs planted, giving this last resting-place of the dead a picturesque aspect.

² Extensions to the cemetery were gazetted in the *N.S.W. Government Gazette* and also indicated on maps of the cemetery developed by the Lands Department.

³ *Armidale Express*, 3 September 1864, p.2.

⁴ *Armidale Express*, 7 October 1865, p.2.

⁵ *Armidale Express*, 3 March 1866, p.2.

It was Brother Francis Gatti who developed Central Park and the West End Park. Following his death on 5 November 1891, there was an attempt to have a public monument erected in Central Park. Plans for such a monument included a band rotunda and later a fountain. A public meeting presided over by Bishop Torreggiani eventually decided on a mortuary chapel within the grounds of the Roman Catholic section of the cemetery. Tenders for the chapel were called in June 1892 and awarded to Mr J. Keenan. It was to be built in a cruciform shape 30 feet by 20 feet, with folding doors 8 feet in width and 14 feet high. It was completed in September and then dedicated to Brother Gatti. The white marble tablet erected over the main entrance read: 'Mortuary Chapel, erected A.D. 1892, in the memory of Brother Francis Gatti, O.S.F.C., who died November 5th, 1891, aged 58 years, R.I.P.'

The *Armidale Express*, 9 June 1893 drew attention to the state of the old cemetery in Falconer (sic) Street: the broken tombstones and the removal of the fence. The correspondent felt this is 'a matter the Borough Council might undertake'. The Department of Public Instruction informed council in June 1894 that it intended to resume the old burial ground; council offered no objection. A notice of resumption of the old burying ground near Falconer (sic) Street, dated 19 March 1895 was advertised by District Inspector of Schools, J.D. Bradley in the local press. The department was prepared to meet expenses incurred in connection with the removal of remains, their re-internment and the removal of headstones. Work commenced on Friday 26 April but it proved to be a difficult task because 'trees have fallen down, fences rotted away and other marks disappeared through the ravages of time it is almost impossible to recognise one grave from another'.⁶ The reporter also commented the headstones date from 1845 to 1860 and between thirty to forty applications for remains to be exhumed have been made. The work was undertaken by Johnson Norris and a staff of workmen and completed by early August 1895. Two weeks later, the *Armidale Express* reported 'the new portion of the public school ground lately enclosed, and including the old cemetery, is now cleared and completed'.⁷

In May 1900 tenders were called for the erection of a picket and paling fence including gates at the Church of England cemetery. Tenders for the construction of the mortuary chapel, which still survives in the present day Anglican section, were called in January 1913. It was formally dedicated in August 1913 by his Lordship Dr Cooper. Designed to cater for full services at the cemetery, it was described as 'an ornate, substantial little building of brick, with a slated roof, and measures internally 18 ft. by 12 ft. Its cost was £200 and the architect Mr R.N. Hickson, of Armidale'.⁸

⁶ *Armidale Express*, 30 April 1895, p.5.

⁷ *Armidale Express*, 13 August 1895, p.5.

⁸ *Armidale Express*, 29 August 1913, p.4.

In 1922 Ald J.A.T. Webb proposed the development of a memorial avenue with public assistance to lead to the cemetery and lists of names of possible donors were published in the *Armidale Chronicle*, 27 May and 17 June 1922. He offered to have a memorial avenue formed from the overhead bridge to the cemetery in July and asked permission to plant trees up to Galloway Street. Council also agreed to allow a select committee of citizens with the mayor acting as a representative to select suitable trees. The Dumaresq Shire engineer, M. Smith offered to mark the alignment for the 140 proposed trees. Twelve months later, Webb sought permission to extend the trees to Dangar Street and he advised the *Armidale Chronicle*, 2 May 1923 125 trees had been paid for and the respective inscription plates attached. That August, a proposal emerged to call the cemetery road Webb Avenue but the name was not adopted.

Council set out to establish a permanent record of the donor of each tree in the Memorial Avenue in October 1929 to be kept at the council chambers; to renumber the trees and to request donors to renew painting on the metal labels. Ten years later in July 1939, J. Laurence, deputy town clerk drew attention to the need for attention to the name plates, tree guards and some trees in the avenue.

Following a request from the Armidale general cemetery trust, council agreed to a one-way traffic system for funeral corteges on the southern side of the railway bridge in March 1944. In September the trust asked Armidale City Council and Dumaresq Shire to assist with the planting of an avenue of trees along the Jessie Street boundary. Council agreed to plant trees from the overhead bridge to the municipal boundary in October. In May 1947 council invited the trustees of the cemetery and the shire 'to undertake responsibility for the maintenance of ... the memorial avenue'.⁹ Two weeks later the shire agreed to the maintenance of the shire's portion of the avenue. On the motion of Ald. A. Jones, council decided in July 1945 to contribute 'a third of the total cost of planting trees from the overhead bridge along Jessie-street to the boundary of the cemetery'¹⁰ along with the cemetery committee and the shire.

The Armidale Chamber of Commerce approached council concerning improvements to the Memorial Avenue and the mayor wrote to the cemetery trust asking it to assume control of the avenue. Council undertook a search for a list of the names of pioneers honoured by the planting of trees but 'it seemed that such a list had never been entrusted to council's care'.¹¹ The late T. Webb was responsible for the planting of the trees and then the work was continued on by the late Mr Perrott of Chevy Chase. Council promised to continue a search for the list of names and replace trees where necessary.

⁹ *Armidale Express*, 28 May 1947, p.8.

¹⁰ *Armidale Express*, 25 July 1945, p.8.

¹¹ *Armidale Express*, 11 June 1947, p.8.

By early 1950, the cemetery was in a deplorable state and many parts were overgrown with long grass. Action was taken in March by the town clerk F.W. Milner 'to convene a meeting of representatives of Dumaresq Shire Council, Armidale Cemetery Trust and the City Council to consider cleaning up the cemetery'.¹² By the end of April, Mayor Dawson and Deputy Mayor Fayle were appointed to represent council. In June the cemetery trust asked Dumaresq Shire 'to co-operate in improving roads leading to the cemetery, in the removal of stumps and undergrowth on ground adjacent to the roadway, and on improvement work within the cemetery'.¹³ Council agreed to a proposal in July 1951 to share costs with the shire and cemetery trust in gravelling footpaths within the cemetery. The shire agreed to complete work on land outside the cemetery.

Mayor L.S. Piddington stated in July 1966 'the cemetery had 10 years' life, and the need for a new cemetery was being investigated by the Lands Department, the Cemetery Trust and the Anglican Church'.¹⁴ At that stage, the cemetery covered slightly more than sixteen acres. The northern land adjoining the cemetery and going to the New England Highway, railway line and Kelly's Plains Road was Crown Land set aside for public purposes. Two months later, the Department of Lands suggested twenty five acres of land between the cemetery and the railway line should be reserved for public recreation and placed under the control of council.

In a report to the Department of Decentralisation and Development in September 1966, the town clerk R.A. Browne listed a crematorium as one of thirteen services industries. Council announced the formation of a sub-committee in July 1967 to investigate the establishment of a lawn cemetery and crematorium in the Armidale area. In the following month, council announced its intention to establish a lawn cemetery as soon as possible to be followed by a crematorium at a later date. Council took control of the cemetery on 1 October in accordance with the Local Government Act which provided for councils to take over control of all cemeteries in their area. The report tabled on the cemetery said all records were handed over and a total of \$2800 in cash and securities was transferred to council from the trustees. A committee was formed consisting of: four representatives from the minister's fraternal; one representative of the Roman Catholic denomination and two representatives of council. Council then set out to redraw a plan of the area and created new roads with the provision of car parking facilities.

The sub-committee of the cemetery committee presented a report on the beam-type cemetery¹⁵ in March 1968. Then in October 1969, council adopted a recommendation of its cemetery layout at the south west corner bounded by

¹² *Armidale Express*, 17 March 1950, p.8.

¹³ *Armidale Express*, 15 June 1951, p.3.

¹⁴ *Armidale Express*, 13 July 1966, p.3.

¹⁵ A beam-type cemetery is one where concrete beams are set in a lawn in a variety of patterns.

Lynches Road and Jessie Street. It showed four paths in the shape of St Andrews cross with concrete beams and lawn graves. The new layout was to provide for up to 200 graves on the south-west corner of the cemetery at the intersection of Jessie Street and Lynche's Road.

In June 1968 council decided to fill land on the northern side of the cemetery. Council decided not to release it and to consider its future when the 1969 estimates were determined.¹⁶

The Department of Decentralisation and Development advised council in January 1969 that no funds were available to establish a crematorium. By July 1970 council had no plans for a crematorium but was 'investigating expanding the cemetery into a beam/lawn type with a columbarium'.¹⁷ The town clerk, R.A. Browne reported to council in May 1971 'the cost of a crematorium at Armidale could be up to to \$100 000'.¹⁸ The city engineer, K.O. Gentle and health surveyor D.M. Crawford were asked to prepare a master plan for the cemetery.

In January 1972 council announced its intention to spend \$40 000 on beautification works and to establish a multi-denominational lawn and beam type cemetery. In addition property and vacant lands were being acquired for expansion of the cemetery and ultimate inclusion in a possible crematorium. In March council announced its intention to use a quarry on Crown Land near the cemetery as a site for a sunken garden. Unemployment Relief Funds were used in 1972 for general improvements including the removal of fences between two parts of the cemetery; the levelling of mounds; drainage; installation of a water service and planting of 200 shrubs and trees. This scheme was never successful and the shrubs and trees perished.

The cemetery was increased in size when portions 575 to 583 and 584 were acquired by council and transfer took place on 27 August 1973. Adjoining roads were closed by notification in the *Government Gazette*, 11 October 1974 with a view to additions to the cemetery. In November council announced that it was 'exploring the possibility of re-zoning portion of land acquired by council for cemetery purposes'.¹⁹ The cemetery committee was also to receive a further report on the costs of establishing a crematorium.

In May 1974, council announced that work was to commence immediately on the car park, roadway, lawn cemetery and sunken garden. 1975 saw the start of the new lawn cemetery and niche wall. In December the town clerk R.A. Browne 'hoped that a start could be made on the new front entrance gates but this was still

¹⁶ *Armidale Express*, 26 June 1968, p.5.

¹⁷ *Armidale Express*, 24 July 1970, p.7. A columbarium is a wall in which there are niches to place the ashes of the cremated.

¹⁸ *Armidale Express*, 14 May 1971, p.5.

¹⁹ *Armidale Express*, 20 November 1974, p.19.

at the design stage'.²⁰ A new road was constructed in 1986 to enable construction of the lawn cemetery and a new garden niche was provided at the cemetery in 1988.

War Memorial Cemetery (Ben Venue)

Early in 1943 a proposal emerged to establish a war cemetery at Armidale following a visit of two military officers to the Dumaresq Shire. One suggested site was located near Ben Venue Public School. Following a special meeting in early March, the Ben Venue Parents and Citizen's Association informed the municipal and shire councils, the Returned Soldier's League, the cemetery trust and members of parliament of its protest 'against the proposal to establish a military cemetery near the practice school'.²¹ Major Glover representing the War Graves Commission met with a representative group of all interested parties and said 'the Ben Venue site is discarded. Suggest another one'.²² A new site near the present cemetery was supported by members of the cemetery trust but the cemetery was never developed.

²⁰ *Armidale Express*, 12 December 1975, p.7.

²¹ *Armidale Express*, 3 March 1943, p.7.

²² *Armidale Express*, 15 March 1943, p.8.