

EAST PERTH CEMETERY

A visit to the heritage East Perth Burial Ground in Bronte Street, East Perth, on Sunday 15th March was organized by WAGS as part of their 30th Anniversary Celebrations.

After a short address by WAGS President Liana Fitzpatrick, we were invited to join the more than 90 visitors in one of five small groups led by a Member of the National Trust to take a short tour. We were shown headstones of well known W.A. identities and in some instances the ancestors of some of our Enrolled Pensioner Guards or members of their families whose burial sites are still evident.

Yvonne and Kevin Coate had a small display, in the Church, of the results of their many years searching and recording 'lonely graves' around Western Australia. They have published books on the subject.

A little history of the Cemetery –

In 1830 a notice was issued by the Colonial Secretary's Office – "to prevent indiscriminate Burials and unpleasant consequences arising therefrom, in a warm climate, a Burial Ground will be set apart in Every Township or Parish." Burials were to take place in them only and a Register was to be kept. Furthermore, all Burials by the Chaplain were restricted to times "as soon after sunrise as possible, or an hour precisely before sunset."

Areas were set aside for Anglican, Roman Catholic and others in later years, as people of other nationalities moved to the Colony, so the size of the grounds increased.

It has been estimated that as many as 10,000 were interred at the site, but less than 800 marked graves and family vaults are still standing.

After the opening of Karrakatta Cemetery in 1900 the East Perth burial site became a rather neglected sight with vandalism and unsavoury behaviour by some groups. In the 1920's public anger at the deterioration of sites and tombstones rose to a marked degree.

As no single Church Group was able to take full responsibility for the whole Cemetery, an Act of Parliament in 1932 re-vested the Cemeteries to the Crown. The National Trust, Royal Western Australian Historical Society, National Park Board and the Perth City Council offered support.

Efforts have been made by those interested in our history to record names on graves and from records in official sources.

The Enrolled Pensioner Guard Group have a list of many of the members of the Enrolled Pensioner Force who were buried in that hallowed ground.

Some visitors on Sunday 15th were able to identify the site of their ancestor's burial and in a few cases a headstone was photographed by the descendant. Unfortunately some of those headstones now lie on the ground.

Further research has identified the Regiment and in some cases the ship on which the Pensioner Guard arrived in Western Australia.



Ron Sutton at the grave of his EPG man Samuel Sutton

Jean McDonald