

A Brief History of the Old Longreach Cemetery

The Old Cemetery was proclaimed as such on 17 December 1891 and an area of 10 acres was set aside (Longreach was gazetted a township in November 1887). In 1920 another 6 acres 3 roods 8 perches was gazetted to form the area we now see today.

It is believed that there was another cemetery at some time in the early history of Longreach although no evidence of its existence remains. Oral histories tell us that it was located to the South of Falcon Street (the original boundary of the town) along the bank of Gin Creek. Severe flooding in the early 1900's did considerable damage to this site and it is believed a decision was made to move the majority of graves to the present site, which was considered above flood level. (Oral histories indicate that some graves were left undisturbed at the old site, but evidence of these burials has disappeared over the years).

Records indicate that around 1910 a number of bodies were disinterred, the majority of which were Chinese. It is not known if the disinterment were simply following Chinese Customs or if the bodies were in fact disinterred and moved to the current cemetery.

The earliest recorded death for the area of Longreach was in November 1886, the burial of a baby "at Thomson River". From this time until 1893, when official Council records commenced, there were 35 deaths recorded by the Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages. No place of burial is known for these souls.

The oldest grave in the cemetery dates back to 1893, the 36-year-old son of a Church of England clergyman born in Brussels, Belgium and married in England. This grave is marked by an intricate iron enclosure with a tin plaque, which once held the inscription of its bearer.

Features of the Old Cemetery

The Old Cemetery is located on the edge of town along the banks of Gin Creek. This site is above flood level. Mounds of gidyeya rocks mark the graves without headstones. Gidyeya rocks are red stones that derive their name from being most prevalent where the Gidyeya trees grow or have grown. There is not a tree located within the Old Cemetery.

Unusual Layout

The Cemetery is laid out in distinct sections, Catholics to the left of the drive, Protestants to the right. The placement of the graves is in itself unusual as they face North-South. Normal configuration of early Victorian Christian Cemeteries was East-West (to the rising sun) with lay people's headstones facing East waiting for the resurrection, and priests and nuns facing West to watch over their flock. Usually only murderers and thieves were buried facing North-South and were sometimes even buried outside the fence of the cemetery.

Chinese/Aboriginal Section

As a reminder of less tolerant times, a section of the cemetery was set aside for the Chinese and Aborigines. An unusual aspect of this cemetery is the inclusion of Chinese and Aboriginal graves within the boundary of the "white" graves. Traditionally these graves were placed outside the fence of most cemeteries. Unfortunately many of these graves have been desecrated with very few still in existence. History also tells us that the family of the Chinese saved to send the bones of their ancestors back to their homeland. It is unknown just how many graves were in this section but very few remain.

Sexton's House

The small house (Sexton's house), which is located on site, is unusual in that it features a stove recess. Oral his-

ories suggest that there used to be a sexton on site to direct people to graves although it is unsure if they actually lived there. The Celtic Cross, traditionally associated with Irish Roman Catholicism, is an interesting feature on this building.

Reliquary Huts

Another interesting feature of the cemetery is the many reliquary huts (small tin houses) placed on graves, which are similar to those in Mediterranean cemeteries. These huts hold photographs and ornate ceramic wreaths depicting much of the symbolism associated with bereavement and remembrance.

Memorials on graves had and still have deep significance. The material, style and words chosen all mean something. The old Longreach cemetery follows tradition in that graves look like beds, they are often fenced, and the common grid layout resembles the patterns of town streets. Fences around graves, as is common in this cemetery, had a practical use in that they prevented stock and wild animals from grazing and disturbing the ground. They also define territory and ownership, locate the dead, and are a sign of care. (Many of the earlier graves have intricate iron fences and wooden railings to mark the grave).

The headstones depict the past lives of the dead - images not of the men and women who lie there, but also of other symbols such as the horses that helped them tame the outback. Other headstones are stark reminders of the men and women who fought for a country they loved and believed in (military graves depicting the symbol of the rising sun).

Over time, some 4500 burials have been performed in the Old Longreach Cemetery. Many headstones remain, but there are also many unmarked graves - evidenced only by a mound of rocks and a steel marker - their occupant's identification lost for all time.

The Longreach Archival & Historical Research Group Inc would like to sincerely thank:



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This information has been gained from various sources and does not claim to be accurate. Our thanks to the many people who helped in the compilation of this pamphlet.

The objects of the Longreach Archival & Historical Research Group Inc are

- To promote and preserve research into local and family history
- To purchase resources and to collect and preserve records of local history for the benefit of the community, with community participation and support.

The Group would like to obtain copies of family documents, photographs and memorabilia that help to bring to life the rich history of Longreach. If families and individuals wish to donate items to the collection, these would be gratefully appreciated.

The Committee welcomes volunteers to assist with any of the current or future projects. No special training or skills are required. An interest in local history is a bonus. Please contact:

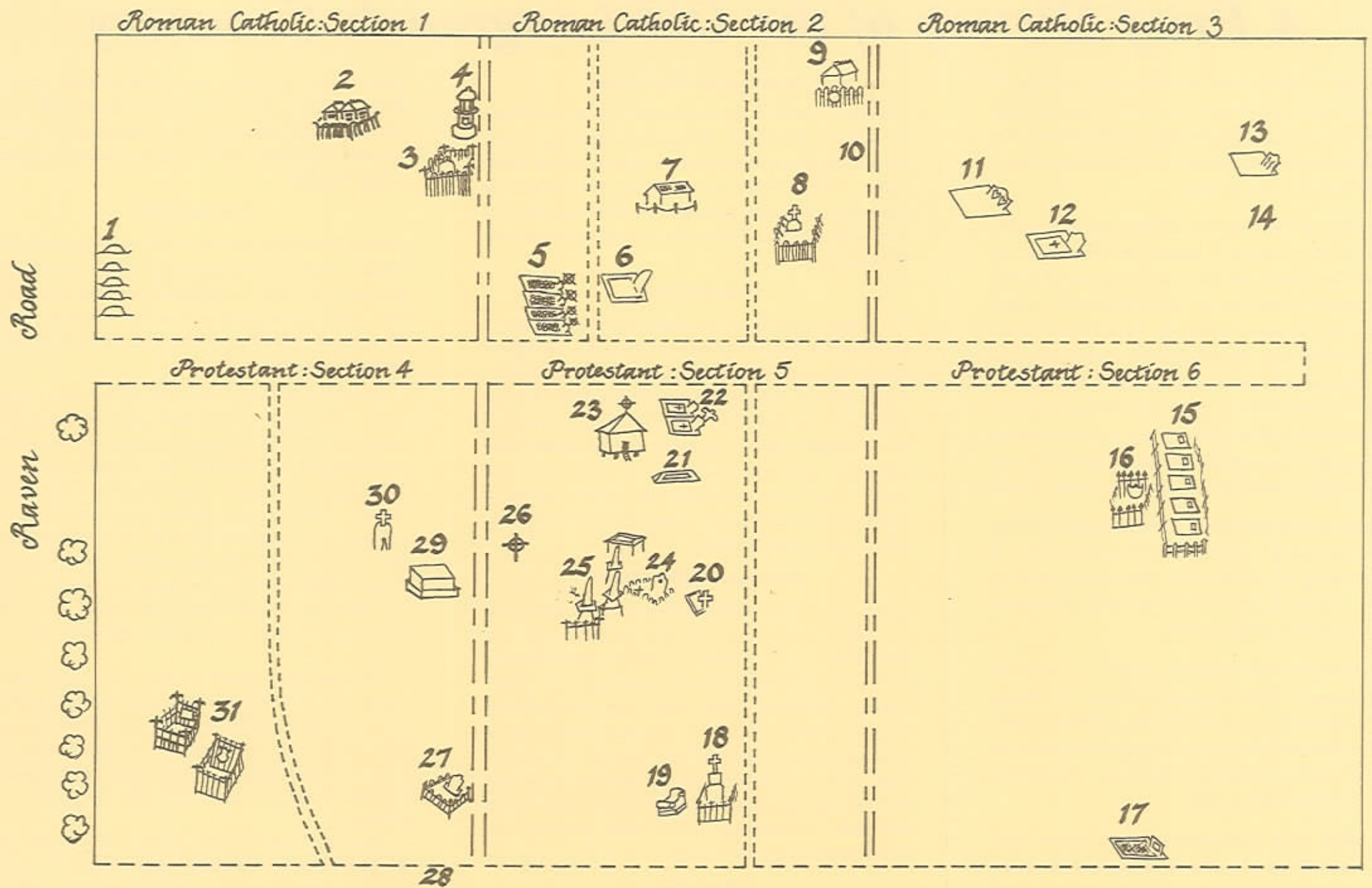


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Self Guided Tour of the Old Longreach Cemetery



Produced by:
Longreach Archival & Historical Research
Group Inc



A Walk Through Time: Self-Guided Tour of the Old Longreach Cemetery

Some Things to Remember:

- Old headstones may be unstable, please do not lean on them.
- Avoid sitting on graves out of respect for their occupants and because some may also be the home of snakes.
- Take only photographs, leave only footprints and look into the past.

The Tour

Over time some 4500 burials have been performed in the Old Cemetery, which is still in use today. Many family plots have been reserved. This tour takes you to interesting headstones and to the resting places of some of the early pioneers of Longreach. Feel free to wander, take in the materials used in the making of headstones, observe the symbols that adorn the memorials and read the epitaphs - the stories in stone which can still convey a message today.

1. Children's graves (Roman Catholic) 1956 to 1968. (Section 1 Row 1).

2. Reliquary houses on graves hold photographs and intricate ceramic wreaths depicting many symbols of remembrance. The houses were made from tin and timber enclosed with glass or netting. Shelves hold the wreaths and personal remembrances. (Section 1 Row 10).

3. John Savage died as a result of burns from the 1898 fire that engulfed a major part of the town business centre. Mr Savage received burns after re-entering his burning shop thinking that there was someone still on the premises. (Section 1 Row 14).

4. Among the many headstones bearing Irish names lays the last resting place of Constable Patrick Cahill. On the morning of 11 February 1898, Constable Cahill drowned while swimming the flooded waters of the Thomson River to rescue a marooned selector and his family. His comrades of the Mitchell district erected this monument. (Section 1 Row 15).

5. The resting place of some of the sisters of the Order of the Presentation of the Ever Blessed Virgin Mary. Longreach served as the Mother House and Novitiate for this order until 1955. The crosses, which were once marble, have been replaced with tin replicas. This same symbol can be found over the Catholic Church and symbolised faith and resurrection and is considered to be the symbol of Christ's sacrifice in the Christian religion. (Section 2 Row 3).

6. The grave of Elizabeth Catherine Payne who died 16 May 1924, the wife of Jack Payne MLA. (Section 2 Row 6).

7. A restored reliquary house. (Section 2 Row 9).

8. On 15 November 1934 a QANTAS plane crashed en route from Longreach to Ilfracombe. The plane was being delivered for the opening of the Australia-England service. R.A. Prendergast, pilot; W.V. Creates, co-pilot and wireless operator, F.R. Charlton, engineer were killed instantly and passenger Bunny Broadfoot, a Shell Company representative, died soon afterwards. Prendergast, Creates and Charlton were buried in Longreach. (Section 2 Row 12).

9. Reliquary house surrounded by wooden picket fence. Note the photograph inside the house. (Section 2 Row 15).

10. Two rows of children's graves. It is believed that the children were buried on this ridge because of the rock formation under the surface of the ground that made it too hard to dig a full size grave. (Section 2 Rows 14 and 15).

11. In the days before motorised transport the carriers, mailmen and coach drivers were the vital link, for isolated families, with the outside world. Ben Eyre was mail contractor and coach driver on the run between Windorah and Longreach from 1894 - 1910. (Section 3 Row 5).

12. Moses Mellick, a Lebanese migrant, celebrated cyclist and one of Longreach's first business men having established a department store before 1892. Until he purchased a horse and buggy, Moses delivered orders to his country clients by bicycle. The business passed on to his sons and finally closed its doors in 1975. (Section 3 Row 7).

13. Very few headstones remain in this section of the graveyard. This was the area designated to people of Chinese and Aboriginal descent. The first Chinese registration is in August 1896. It is believed that the families of the deceased saved until they could afford to have their loved ones disinterred and the remains returned to China, as was their custom. This headstone is a memorial to Pompey Moo, the father of a large family and much respected Chinese family of Longreach. (Section 3 Row 14).

14. Looking ahead in the Chinese/Aboriginal section of the cemetery. Only one headstone is visible. Other headstones have been discovered in the grass. (Section 3 Row 14).

15. The Rayment family burial plot, which has been well maintained. (Section 6 Row 13).

16. Close to the Rayment family and in contrast is the grave of William Forster, killed by the "Oakley" car. Note the simple but detailed iron fence and marble headstone, many of which can be seen in this cemetery. (Section 6 Row 12).

17. Major Edgar Towner was awarded the Victoria Cross for extreme bravery and the Military Cross in the First and Second World Wars. He was accorded full military honours following his death in 1972. The town came to a standstill as hundreds of mourners from all over Australia lined the streets to pay their last respects to a great Westerner. (Section 6 Row 13).

18. On 23 November 1906, the "oldest, most faithful and most trusted officer" of the Australian Workers Union died. William Kewley had been secretary for 20 consecutive years commencing his appointment in Blackall with the Queensland Shearers Union. On amalgamation with the Labourers Union he was appointed to Longreach - a position he held up until his death. Mr Kewley died on his 62nd birthday. Longreach served as the headquarters of the second Shearers' Strike which occurred in 1894. (Section 5 Row 10).

19. Longreach Cinderella - a sad reminder to a little girl, Grace MacDonald, the victim of a terrible crime for which her captors received the death penalty. The sentence was overturned and they were committed for life receiving parole some 15 years later. (Section 5 Row 8).

20. The Old Cemetery is laid out North-South with only one grave facing East-West in the normal manner. This grave is of a child, Robert Michod who died in 1907. Robert was the son of the local doctor, Dr F.A. Hope Michod. (Section 5 Row 10).

21. To the memory of Marie Parker, this headstone is formed from cement in the shape of a sarcophagus (Section 5 Row 9).

22. The legendary Sam Fuller and his daughter Caroline lay here. Sam was a well-known figure throughout the Central West for his droving prowess as well as his famous buckjumping show. Sam's show featured as entertainment, with many would-be stockmen trying to ride his horses in an endeavour to win prizes. (Section 5 Row 9).

23. Sexton's house - this small house is unusual in that it features a stove recess. Oral histories suggest that there used to be someone on site to direct people to graves. In recent years it has been used as a storage shed. Restoration of this house is soon to be carried out. (Section 5 Rows 7 and 8).

24. An intricate grave with beautiful stonework, which has succumbed to the weather. This is the final resting place of Emily Douglas, buried in 1904. This style of headstone can be found in other areas of the cemetery. Also buried with Emily Douglas is her daughter, Margaret. (Section 5 Row 8).

25. This section of the cemetery is prominent for its many varied monuments. High spires of coloured

granite, an altar with sarcophagus and a sandstone obelisk dating back to 1899 - all standing the test of time against the weather. (Some of the granite spires have been removed because they became too dangerous). (Section 5 Rows 5 and 7).

26. A simple memorial to a child, which will stand the test of time. A Celtic cross made of heavy metal; the inscription within the circle of the cross is raised. "Suffer little children who come unto me". (Section 5 Row 2).

27. The graves of Creates and Charlton who died on 15 November 1934 in the QANTAS plane crash. (Section 4 Row 18).

28. Oral history tells of a woman who was buried outside the grounds of the cemetery at a North-West/South-East alignment because of an inter-family feud. This grave was lost when the lawn cemetery was created. It is thought to be situated around this point. (Section 4).

29. R.H. Edkins was the first chairman of the Longreach Divisional Board and Shire Councillor for 15 years, founder and president of the Amateur Race Club for 25 years. Mr Edkins was held in high esteem for his commitment to the development of Longreach. "He was not only an outstanding man in Longreach and district but was one of the outstanding men in the State, and his name was known from one end of the Commonwealth to the other." (Section 4 Row 16).

30. The ravages of time. Dating back to 1894, this monument demonstrates the impact of wind, water and time on delicate sandstone. (Section 4 Row 14).

31. An early part of the Protestant section of the cemetery. The earliest recorded burials can be found here. Note the placement of the graves when the cemetery first came into use.

Earliest recorded existing identifiable grave - Frederick Kessler died on 23 April 1893 aged 36 years, the son of Church of England clergyman born in Brussels, Belgium; and married in England. His grave bears no identification of the person within this intricate railing surround. Note the tin plaque, which at one time bore the name of this man. (Section 4 Row 6).

Not far from Kessler is the grave of a child Annie Gardner - the daughter of a hotelkeeper. This grave is the second recorded existing reminder of our early pioneers. (Section 4 Row 5).