

BOROONDARA GENERAL CEMETERY TRUST
REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY
OCTOBER 22, 2019

Welcome everyone to the Boroondara General Cemetery Trust's community meeting as part of our 160 years anniversary celebrations. I am Judith Voce, Chair of the Boroondara General Cemetery Trust.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land on which we meet today, the people of the Kulin Nation, and pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

I would like to acknowledge my fellow Trust Members and sincerely thank them for the significant amount of voluntary work they commit to their roles as Trust Members: Deputy Chair- John Fittock, Mary-Anne Carmody, Helen Page, Linda Polazzon, Sumi Prabhakaran, Greg Nolan, Patrick Nolan and Gavan O'Keefe. Thank you also to our General Manager Lea Ram and her team of staff for their commitment to providing high quality cemetery services.

It is my pleasure to provide this report to community members on behalf of the Trust, with input from Trust Members, who also participate on various Committees and Working Groups. This report is an overview of our governance and management activities over the past ten years with an emphasis on current and future projects.

As background information, Boroondara General Cemetery is one of the oldest cemeteries in Victoria with heritage listed buildings, perimeter wall and significant monuments. The first burial was Ellen Quick and was undertaken on March 12, 1859. The Cemetery is still fully functional offering burial interment, crypt interment and cremated remains interments and memorialisation.

I have the honour of being the first female Trust Member and subsequent first female Chair but happy to report we now have a gender balance of 5 women and 4 men. The Trust comprises 9 volunteers from the community with backgrounds ranging from finance, law, banking, engineering, taxation, horticulture, governance and community. Trust Members are appointed by the Minister of Health for a period of five years with the opportunity to reapply for further terms.

We employ 6 fulltime employees and 5 casual staff. We also hire contract labour for specialised work including arborists, horticulturists, auditors, financial advisors, architects, project managers, masons and engineers.

We have an extensive maintenance program and employ sustainable practices in all our undertakings. Over the past ten years the Trust has undertaken an extensive restoration and renovation program using funds we have generated through well managed investments, some minor grants and cemetery services. It is important to note that we do not receive any government funding to support the cemetery and we have finite assets for sale, therefore, our investment policy and strategy is crucial to maintaining our current total equity of \$16,283,872. Consequently, we have established our perpetual maintenance fund to provide financial resources into the foreseeable future as part of our strategic plan for the next 25 to 50 years.

As part of our major refurbishment and maintenance works have been two of our valuable assets listed on the Victorian Heritage Assets Register – the Gatehouse and the Perimeter Brick Wall.

Wall Rectification Works

You may have noticed the recent construction activity on the perimeter brick wall around the cemetery. This wall was constructed in 1896, which makes it over 120 years old. It is 1.7km long and consists of 551 panels in both full brick construction and iron palisades, which took over 600,000 bricks to build! A clever way to boost employment during the 1890's depression!

Given its age it does require some maintenance from time to time. We have sought expert advice from structural engineers and heritage architects and are taking this opportunity to upgrade some of the old construction techniques to a modern-day equivalent.

Plus, given its significance in Kew's history, we are taking extra care to repair and restore the wall with the respect that it deserves. We have also been successful in obtaining a grant of \$200,000 from Heritage Victoria to partly fund the required refurbishment works.

We have rebuilt some sections of the wall by reusing the existing bricks; each one was meticulously cleaned and prepared before being re-laid. Whilst externally the wall looks the same, we upgraded the internal working of the wall to ensure its structural integrity far into the future. We have also completed some crack repairs and repointing of mortar of some panels. A survey program has also been implemented for ongoing monitoring of some panels identified as having a minor lean.

Gatehouse Project

The Gatehouse building was also renovated earlier this year. We engaged architects and interior designers to re-design the internal layout to open it up for community use, whilst preserving and maintaining the heritage aspects of the building. It now includes this multi-purpose meeting room, the adjacent community space for the Friends, improved office and reception areas and refurbished kitchen and toilet facilities. The upstairs flat has also been refurbished for a residential tenancy. You can see some 'before' and 'after' photos of the building on the presentation slides that are running in the background.

We will also continue to investigate options to beautify the area immediately surrounding the Gatehouse.

Other Projects

Some of the other maintenance works completed in the last few years include:

- Re-instating or repairing the footpaths, with more than 85% of the paths completed to date;
- Creating a family access pathway and ramp at the High Street pedestrian gates and building a new toilet block at the High Street gate for females, disabled and family use;
- Painting the original gates that are on display near the mausoleum;
- Forging two matching pedestrian gates from the original design for the High Street and Parkhill Road entrances;
- Refurbishing the clock faces on the clock tower plus repairing and reinstating the bells "Faith, Hope and Charity" in the clock tower;
- Replacing all galvanised pipes throughout the cemetery;
- Renovating the depot building with new paint and flooring;
- Completion of the above ground Garden Crypts, which won Boroondara Council's Urban Design Award in 2012, and commissioned the 'Forgotten People' sculpture by Michael Meszaros located in the community grave area.

As well as providing cemetery services and maintaining our infrastructure we are implementing a program of horticultural beautification in the cemetery to provide a visually pleasing place for families and the community to visit. This is part of the Trust's strategic plan that has been established for the next ten, twenty and fifty years.

Horticulture

- In recent years the horticultural features of the cemetery have been increased bringing it slowly back to its original concept of a garden cemetery.
- The memorial rose garden at the entrance is maintained by garden contractors to a very high standard. This season is about to burst forth and promises to be a beautiful display.
- The garden crypt area near the High Street gate is also maintained by garden contractors and looks wonderful all year.
- Throughout the cemetery small areas are being gardened by our 2 day a week gardener.
- The very large fenced grave in the middle of the cemetery, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd Convent at Abbotsford, has been transformed into an amazing garden by the students with learning difficulties from the Kew Neighbourhood Learning Centre. Last year this project won the Innovation Award at the Cemeteries and Crematoria Association of Victoria's annual awards.
- Over the last 3 years more than 300 roses have been planted throughout the cemetery: many heritage roses propagated from old roses in other cemeteries and each year many roses from the memorial rose garden, which were thought to have passed their best, have been given a second chance and most are thriving. A gardener specialising in rose care has been engaged for one day a week to look after these 300 plus roses.
- Along the High Street side of the cemetery the Friends of the Cemetery working bees conducted on the first Saturday and third Wednesday of each month clean up and plant earth graves with a wide selection of flowering plants. Plants are donated by people aware of the Friends' program. Melbourne Polytechnic horticulture students attend some working bees and also propagate many plants for us in their propagation classes.
- Other areas of the cemetery are slashed or sprayed with herbicide to keep them 'tidy'.

Environment

- We are striving to manage the landscape sustainably and all green waste is collected by a compost maker and does not go to landfill.
- Layers of wood chips and newspaper are used to mulch earth graves and to suppress weeds.
- Melbourne Polytechnic environmental students have cleaned up and planted native grasses in the sugar gum area.
- In 2018 a Melbourne University environmental studies student planted up an area to assess a range of native grasses, forbs and bulbs and it is hoped we may be able to extend that planting when time and manpower allows.

We'd like to encourage everyone to visit the cemetery and take a walk to see and enjoy some of these areas.

IT committee report

Until now, the cemetery has been heavily reliant on its historical record books, which are up to 160 years old and record all the burials which have taken place in the cemetery during its long history. This year, with the assistance of a government grant, the cemetery was able to have these historic books digitised, so that they can be referred to electronically, greatly reducing the wear and tear on the original books. Plans are also underway to modernise our record keeping for the cemetery, to make it easier for staff to make and refer to records. The IT committee has also been instrumental in refreshing the cemetery website to update the photos and information. Further work is planned in this area to make the website more helpful to the public, particularly in providing more detailed location information for searches.

Another major piece of work which was completed this year is one which we have Elaine Race of the Friends of Boroondara Cemetery Trust to thank for. With the assistance of information provided to her by cemetery office staff, Elaine has prepared a mammoth spreadsheet showing details of almost all the burials in the cemetery grounds. For this, earlier this month she was awarded the Ray Tonkin Award by the Victorian Heritage Council. She has provided this spreadsheet to the cemetery to enable it to be used to help in our work, and we acknowledge and thank Elaine for the great contribution which she has made.

Historical projects

The cemetery's historical committee has been working with the cemetery staff to obtain more detailed information about the history of the cemetery's management. Many people buried in the cemetery, including past Trust Members, have made major contributions to society. A project is underway to see that these people and other important groups are recognised in the cemetery, and it is hoped that grant funding will be obtained to assist with appropriate signage.

Springthorpe Memorial

As background information, there are a number of facts that pertain to the Springthorpe Memorial:

- The memorial is actually private property. The owners are the various descendants of Dr Springthorpe who are scattered around the globe and they must grant appropriate permission for any restoration to occur.
- The Victorian Cemeteries & Crematoria Act prevents the Boroondara Cemetery from spending any of its funds from operations on this memorial.
- As the memorial is on the Victorian Heritage Register, Heritage Victoria must approve any conservation works.

An overview of activity over the past twelve months on the Springthorpe Memorial Conservation Project is as follows:

- The Trust has established a working group, which comprises Trust Members, Staff, and representatives of interested community groups (such as Friends of and Kew Historical Society).
- The Trust has commissioned and paid for two reports into the memorial. The conclusions are that it is structurally sound, and there is a list of 60+ recommendations for conservation.
- We have applied to Heritage Victoria for a grant to part-fund conservation, but unfortunately Heritage Victoria recently rejected the request. Estimated costs are close to \$500,000.

In respect of the next twelve months, we are heading into the crucial period for this project:

- The next year will pave the road to success or lead to a complete re-evaluation of strategy.
- By the end of March 2020, the Trust will need to find a suitable project manager, and this person will need to be a heritage architect. There is a limited pool to select from and they are in high demand.
- We will also need to obtain quotations from experienced contractors so we may again apply for grant funding – a key requirement of Heritage Victoria.
- Then there is the task of raising sufficient funding pledges so that work may proceed. All future costs must be paid for by grants and public donations.
- Should we succeed in all of those items, we will still need a permit from Heritage Victoria and appropriate legal permission from the Springthorpe clan.

I suggest you look to our web site for updates, and please consider how you, or your network, may be able to assist in this project.

Friends of Boroondara (Kew) Cemetery

One of the most important community relationships we have formed over the past ten years has been the formation of the Friends of Boroondara (Kew) Cemetery. We are privileged to have this very dedicated group of friends who support our cemetery in a number of tangible ways: an example being with the aid of the FOBKC we refurbished the Rotunda/summerhouse for community use.

In conclusion

The Trust is proud of its history, its place in the community and the fact it has remained an independent Class B Cemetery through the process of industry change of cemetery amalgamations. Our Strategic Plan is focussed on providing high quality cemetery services, well maintained premises complemented by beautiful surrounds, a community focus and an asset for all to enjoy now and well into the future.

On behalf of the Boroondara Cemetery Trust, I thank everyone for their attendance at our community meeting tonight and hope that we have provided you with an informative oversight of the management and works undertaken in the cemetery to preserve this valuable asset.

Judith Ooze

Chair

Boroondara General Cemetery Trust