

## ***Burial: both an end and a means***



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## **Caveats and Thanks**



Pine Mountain Congregational Cemetery

- I'm not an expert!
- Thanks to David Horton
- Will be discussing Queensland but other states are broadly similar

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## **Motivations: Why we care about burial?**

- “An End”: where a person’s life finishes
  - Fill in “Burial” field: just knowledge-seeking
  - Satisfy a psychological need for “closure”
  - To visit to pay respect to our ancestors
- “Means”: we can learn much from burial to help us in our family history research more generally

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## **History of burial (Queensland)**

- First half of the 1800s
  - Not many people, sparsely distributed
  - No local government, no rules, no death registration
  - Very few priests/ministers, even fewer churches
  - Mostly private burials, anywhere convenient
  - No priests, no undertakers, just family/friends with a shovel and a prayer
  - Unlikely to be a surviving memorial
  - Not a lot of records were kept (priests and family bibles)

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## **History of burial (Queensland)**

- Moreton Bay Courier, 20 June 1846
  - *“the present disgraceful state of the old burial ground in North Brisbane ... pigs and other animals rooting and roving ... may chance to witness the remains of those interred exposed to public view”*
- In crowded European towns/cities
  - epidemics (e.g. cholera) are commonplace
  - miasma theory – illness caused by “bad air” spreading disease from rotting organic matter
  - the concept of “public health” appears
  - burial is to be regulated for public health

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## **History of burial (Queensland)**

- Late 1800s
  - Civil registration of deaths in NSW/Qld (1856)
  - Queensland becomes a separate colony (1859)
    - Cemeteries needed to be gazetted
  - municipalities: Brisbane (1859), Ipswich (1860), etc
    - generally restricted burials to large cemeteries on the town outskirts
    - generally opposed to churchyard/private burial in residential areas
  - Outside municipalities
    - fewer rules, mostly town/community cemeteries, churchyard cemeteries, some private burials (usually due to distance)

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## History of burial (Queensland)

- Late 1800s
  - A gazetted cemetery had a board of trustees, who were responsible for the cemetery, including record keeping
  - More likely to have a headstone or other memorial
    - Greater availability of suitable stone and stone masons
  - Greater involvement of priests and undertakers in burial practices
  - Funerals are mostly processions from the home to the cemetery, followed by a religious burial service at the graveside (not very personal)

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## Funeral of James Foote Ipswich 1890



- Founder of Cribb & Foote department store
- Member of Parliament
- Prominent citizen of Ipswich

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## History of burial (Queensland)

- 1900s
  - More restrictions on churchyard and private burials
  - Local councils taking over from private trustees
    - Better record-keeping
  - Some cemeteries are abandoned and overgrown
  - Introduction of cremation as an alternative to burial
  - Church funerals, followed by short graveyard service
  - Funeral services with eulogies and personalisation
  - Funerals in funeral parlours rather than churches, but still conducted by priests
  - Introduction of secular funeral celebrants
  - Introduction of lawn graves

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## History of burial (Queensland)

- 2000s
  - Funerals are now “celebrations of the life”, highly personalised, social occasions held in wider range of venues
  - Reducing role of religion, but still important
  - Actual burial/cremation is often private or unattended
  - Cremation is more common than burial
    - Cheaper, but paupers are buried
  - Limited land available for new cemeteries in cities
    - greater re-use of older graves
    - suggestions of reduced tenure of graves
    - ongoing maintenance costs with little/no income

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## Cremation: not an option

- 1863: proposed but not popular
- Late 1800s: public opinion in favour, but with strong opposition
- 1909: first Queensland cremated
  - In Melbourne!
- 1913: cremation legal in Queensland
  - A “cheerful” option
  - strict safeguards (deceased had to leave instructions to allow cremation)
  - “NIMBY” prevents Brisbane crematorium being built

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## Cremation: an option

- 1934: Mt Thompson crematorium opens
  - Bodies sent by rail from all over Queensland
- Catholics
  - 1890: Pope said no cremation
  - about 1965: cremation allowed
- Late 1900s: more crematoriums open in cities and larger towns
- Crematoriums, like cemeteries, must keep records about cremations

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## Crematoriums: Ashes

Legally, ashes can be disposed of as you please:

- Buried
- Placed in a columbarium (wall of niches)
- Scattered
- Kept in an urn
- Or shot into space, made into jewellery ...

Catholics:

- ashes to be buried or in a niche, with a plaque
- not scattered nor kept at home nor ...

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## Crematoriums: Ashes

By law, records should be kept of burial, placement or scattering of ashes *in a cemetery or crematorium*

- Otherwise no records need be kept

Columbariums at churches:

- St Mark's Anglican at Warwick, the first in 1938
- Not inside the main church, but separate "out of sight"
- No records required, but may have them (and there's usually a plaque)

Ashes can be split with different disposals

- Multiple spouses, lived in multiple places

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## Burials: when?

- Early 1800s: day of death or next day
- Late 1800s: next day (or day after to avoid Sunday), sometimes same day
- 1900s: next day or two
- Very late 1900s to 2000 : a few days to a week
  - Allow relatives and friends to travel from elsewhere
  - Preparation of more detailed "celebration of life"
- Cremation: similar but any burial/placement of ashes is usually weeks/months after cremation
  - Cemetery registers may not clearly indicate "ashes" but likely if a long gap between death and "burial"

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## Burials: where?

- 1800s: near where they died
  - Sick people at home not hospital
  - May have travelled to larger places (Brisbane, Sydney or London) to seek medical treatment
  - May die away (on route) on interstate/overseas visits
- 1900s: railways can transport the body to other locations
  - Home town (if died elsewhere)
  - Where other family members are buried
  - Other locations where they have lived
  - Cremated in Brisbane or other distant crematorium

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## Burial sources: death certificates

- Queensland death certificates usually very accurate about burial
- "Current" information supplied by the funeral director, not historic information supplied by grieving relatives or uninformed informant
- Witnesses to the burial are listed
- Problem: never heard of the burial place
  - Queensland Place Names website
  - Renamed Places in Queensland website

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## Burial sources: burial/cremation registers

Good news:

- In law, all burials/cremations are recorded in registers which can be accessed by the public
- Should include name, date of death/burial, location of grave within cemetery

Bad news:

- "Access" is on their terms not yours!
- Older registers can be incomplete or be lost, or be updated from other info (not a "true record")
- Private trustees are hard to track down
  - May be dead and replaced with informal trustees
  - Check local family history society
  - Local funeral directors may know trustees

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### Burial sources: council burial/cremation registers

#### Good news:

- councils are better at record keeping
- many are now online, e.g. Brisbane ☺

#### Bad news:

- Council may not be original trustee
- Council mergers have lost local knowledge
- Published burial registers may contain only part of the information in the originals
  - Privacy is often the reason

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### Burial sources: monumental inscriptions

- Information taken from monuments, headstones, plaques etc on the grave/niche

#### Warnings:

- Headstones are family responsibility, can write anything, can make mistakes, can tell lies!
- A burial might not have a *surviving* headstone
  - Poorer families used wood, which doesn't last
- People may be memorialised on a family headstone but not be buried there (WW1)
- Headstones can be easily misinterpreted

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### Burial sources: interpreting inscriptions

John McDonald, died 1945  
His wife, Mary, died 1965  
Their daughter, Jane Robertson, died 1975  
Her sister Ruth Richards, died 1976

- What was Mary's surname at death?
- Is Robertson/Richards a surname or middle name?
- Whose sister? Mary's? Jane's?
- Best if you can see the original or a photo than just see a transcription (due to possible interpretation errors)

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### Burial sources: newspapers

#### Death/funeral notices, obituaries, funeral reports

- Funeral notices appear in local newspapers after death and before the funeral
- Death notices usually within a week locally but may be later elsewhere
- Especially check popular Saturday editions
- Obituaries and funerals reports are often held over to fill a "slow news day" so check for some weeks later locally, even further remotely

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### Burial sources: newspapers

- Check place-of-death newspapers and/or home town newspapers
  - Trove digitised newspapers (mostly to 1954)
    - Search for names or browse after date of death
  - Microfilm in libraries (Ask a Librarian service)
    - Browse-only!
  - Some local/family history societies have newspaper cuttings books, sometimes indexed

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### Burial sources: newspapers

#### Bad news:

- Local newspaper not daily, can't publish daily funeral notices
- Too expensive for poor families, not used by illiterate families (1800s) or non-English-speaking families
- May not mention the place of burial if funeral is conducted first at a church or funeral parlour
- "Privately interred/cremated" rarely say where

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### Burial source: funeral directors records

Good news: will have burial details

- And other interesting information!

Bad news: not many are available

- Private companies and no legal requirement for archiving nor access
- Local family history societies may have negotiated access, check their holdings/publications

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### Wills

- Wills themselves don't have burial information, but a few may have funeral instructions
- Probate files (Queensland State Archives) will have a death certificate with burial details

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### Finding particular burial registers and monumental inscriptions

- Australian Cemeteries website
- Trove (mostly in Books) – what exists and which major libraries (but not FHSs) hold it
- Catalogue of your family history society – Some (like QFHS) are online
- Catalogue at a local family history society
- Plain old Google search

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### No idea where: try online content aggregators

- Ancestry, FindMyPast, FindAGrave, BillionGraves, interment.net, etc
  - Not all are free, but QFHS has subscriptions for pay sites
- Our 200+ SE Queensland cemetery photos
- Australian Cemetery Index photos
- Family trees in Ancestry, Rootsweb etc – but check what you find (not entirely reliable)

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### No idea where: try QFHS!

- Visit the QFHS Cemetery Room
  - Burial registers, monumental inscriptions, headstone photos, funeral directors records, card index, etc

Generally, anything is worth a look, but all are a lucky dip

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### Missing women

- Women are particularly difficult to find in records due to changing surnames
- “Married” surname may be “de facto”, and different records at death may use “official” vs “de facto” surname
- Always lookup any known surname
- Where possible, search just on given names in case of unknown final surname
  - Works best if given names are uncommon

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## Visiting cemeteries

- Find out where the cemetery is and how to get there
  - Australian Cemetery Geolocations website
  - Google maps
- Bring names, dates, and any grave location info with you (no use at home!)
  - camera, spare battery, spare memory card
  - Laptop, tablet, mobile phone useful way to bring family tree (may see another grave of interest)
  - But no wifi Internet in cemeteries, need to BYO 3G mobile data

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## Visiting cemeteries

- Most cemeteries open in daylight hours and don't have serious fences
  - But worth checking any restrictions in advance (long drive for nothing)
- Come prepared! Hazards include:
  - Weather (hot, cold, wet, windy)
  - Insects, long and prickly weeds, allergies!
  - Occasional snake, spiders, "guard" dog

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## Visiting cemeteries

People are another problem:

- Joggers, dog walkers, etc don't look!
- Vandals, satanic rituals (police!)
- Mourners – give them some privacy

Tripping/slipping hazards:

- Subsidence of graves
- Fallen headstones (often face forward)
- Rusty metal fences (tetanus shot!)

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## Visiting cemeteries

- Photography – generally no restrictions
- But avoid photography around mourners
- Don't go at night
  - No ghosts, but plenty of trip hazards
  - Hard to photograph
  - May be closed

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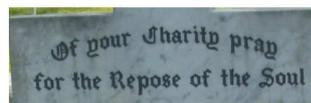
## Cemetery layout

- Larger cemeteries are usually organised into sections, rows, etc. Some aren't ☹
- Check online for any information before you leave home.
- In the cemetery, look for maps, row numbers, etc. A little looking can save a lot of walking!
- Some areas dedicated to particular religions, e.g. Catholic vs Protestant
- Some areas obviously too old, too new (e.g. lawn graves) – aim for the most likely areas first
- Smaller cemeteries – no system, just walk around

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## Catholic indications

- rosaries, celtic crosses
- Christograms: IHS, JHS
- "pray for the soul", Latin
- Irish/Italian names



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## Cemeteries: walk the boundaries!

- Make sure you check the whole cemetery
  - Not all graves are in plain sight
- Look for single or small groups of graves or plaques near or just over the boundaries, tucked in corners, behind a group of trees etc
- Why?
  - Wrong religion (church cemetery)
  - Not Christian (even in secular cemeteries)
  - Suicide or other “evil”
  - Mental or infectious illness
  - Scattering of ashes

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## Wooden headstones



Very common choice because it was cheap and available, but does not last long – a missing headstone was probably a wooden one

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## Sandstone headstones



- Readily available stone for pioneers
- Easily eroded by weather

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## Grey granite



Currently popular – looks good when new and shiny, but difficult to read with age. Attracts lichen.

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## Pink granite



- Same cemetery both 1896
- Pink granite can become unreadable quickly

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## Marble headstones



Despite breaking, burning and loss of lead lettering, these 1890s marble headstones are still easily transcribed

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## Death is good news for the genealogist!

- Death creates records
  - Death certificate
  - Funeral directors records
  - Burial/cremation registers
  - Headstones and monumental inscriptions
  - Newspapers: death/funeral notices, obituaries, reports of funerals, in memoriams
  - Wills, probates, transfer of real estate
  - Family bibles, family letters, etc
- Don't just focus on the primary person, and overlook clues about others in the family

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## Oct 1948: Joseph Pritchard buried where?

Directors.  
PRITCHARD.—Relatives & Friends of Mrs. M. A. Pritchard & Mary (Racecourse Rd., Southport), Mr. & Mrs. W. Pritchard & Family (Murwillumbah), Mr. & Mrs. G. Pritchard & Family (Southport), Mr. & Mrs. E. Bonan & Family (Southport), Mr. & Mrs. Loughheed (New Farm), Mr. & Mrs. C. Collins & Family (Woodford), & Mrs. C. Pritchard & Family (Byron Bay) are invited to attend the Funeral of her late dearly beloved Husband & their Father, Father-in-law, & Grandfather, Joseph Pritchard, to leave the Church of Engisland, Southport, after service commencing at 2 p.m. Tomorrow (Saturday), October 23, for the Southport Cemetery.  
JOHNSTON & FREEMAN, PTY. LTD., Funeral Directors, Southport.

## What else did we learn?

Directors.  
PRITCHARD.—Relatives & Friends of Mrs. M. A. Pritchard & Mary (Racecourse Rd., Southport), Mr. & Mrs. W. Pritchard & Family (Murwillumbah), Mr. & Mrs. G. Pritchard & Family (Southport), Mr. & Mrs. E. Bonan & Family (Southport), Mr. & Mrs. Loughheed (New Farm), Mr. & Mrs. C. Collins & Family (Woodford), & Mrs. C. Pritchard & Family (Byron Bay) are invited to attend the Funeral of her late dearly beloved Husband & their Father, Father-in-law, & Grandfather, Joseph Pritchard, to leave the Church of Engisland, Southport, after service commencing at 2 p.m. Tomorrow (Saturday), October 23, for the Southport Cemetery.  
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## What didn't it say?

Directors.  
PRITCHARD.—Relatives & Friends of Mrs. M. A. Pritchard & Mary (Racecourse Rd., Southport), Mr. & Mrs. W. Pritchard & Family (Murwillumbah), Mr. & Mrs. G. Pritchard & Family (Southport), Mr. & Mrs. E. Bonan & Family (Southport), Mr. & Mrs. Loughheed (New Farm), Mr. & Mrs. C. Collins & Family (Woodford), & Mrs. C. Pritchard & Family (Byron Bay) are invited to attend the Funeral of her late dearly beloved Husband & their Father, Father-in-law, & Grandfather, Joseph Pritchard, to leave the Church of Engisland, Southport, after service commencing at 2 p.m. Tomorrow (Saturday), October 23, for the Southport Cemetery.  
JOHNSTON & FREEMAN, PTY. LTD., Funeral Directors, Southport.

• Learn what is normally said so you can spot what is NOT said

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## Research your in-laws!

- If our in-laws appears in our family records, then our family appear in our in-law family records
- Vital clues about *your* family are in the death (and other) records of your *in-law* families
- E.g. Clues to the missing husband of Mrs C. Pritchard might lie in *her father's* funeral notice in 1942, which mention the couple being in London

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## Take-home messages!

- Records of death and burial are a rich source of information for all aspects of family history
- Use the most original sources available
  - avoid mis-interpretation, mis-transcription and filtering
- Vital clues may lie in the records of their relatives and in-laws
  - This is a way around the brickwall!

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