

INQUIRY INTO FUNERAL INDUSTRY

Organisation: National Trust of Australia (New South Wales)
Name: Ms Jacqui Goddard
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Date Received: 14/10/2005

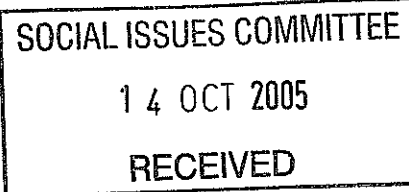
Theme:

Summary



28 September 2005

Ms Jan Burnswoods
Committee Chair
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000



Dear Ms Burnswoods,

Re: Inquiry into the Funeral Industry

Thank you for your letter regarding the Legislative Council's Inquiry into the Funeral Industry and your interest in the National Trust's cemetery survey.

The National Trust of Australia (NSW) has been undertaking cemetery surveys since 1981. The aim of the work is to identify, document and assess the significance of over 3000 cemeteries and to understand and record their historical value for the community. We are also currently investigating ways of developing innovative models for sustainability and possible reuse of old cemeteries, to assist with future planning.

The term 'cemetery' encompasses a wide range of burial grounds. It includes very large Crown cemeteries such as Rookwood Necropolis, but also includes churchyards, Aboriginal cemeteries, general cemeteries operated by local councils, closed cemeteries like Gore Hill, family cemeteries on private land as well as lone graves. The Trust also uses the term when referring to unmarked burials, where the bodies lie in situ, but all above ground markers have disappeared.

For each survey the Trust undertakes historical research of parish maps and the local historical society resources before recording evidence found on site with photographs, drawings and text. In the field, the Trust records a range of features including the epitaph (in larger cemeteries only the more interesting ones are recorded), monumental materials, masons' name, location, setting, vegetation, landform, percentage of cemetery used, condition of the site, threats, monument forms, access, fences, general layout, maintenance issues as well as conservation and management recommendations. Following the survey, the collected data is assessed by the Trust's Cemeteries Conservation Committee and an index card prepared for the Trust's archives. If the cemetery is deemed to be significant, a classification card is prepared and the item is listed on the National Trust's Register. The survey information is freely available to local governments and the general public.

The Trust generally undertakes two surveys a year; one in a regional area, the other in Sydney. Whilst the Trust surveyed most of the Sydney Metropolitan area in the early 1980s, it is revisiting the Sydney survey as many cemeteries are increasingly coming under threat from development, especially on the fringes of Sydney. Last year the Trust discovered a cemetery in Blacktown that no longer existed, due to the expansion of a shopping centre.

The National Trust is a not-for-profit, non-government, community-based organisation working to conserve our built, natural and cultural heritage.

After 24 years, the Trust is approximately two thirds of the way through the survey, but the level of detail in the records ranges considerably. Many records are comprehensive, but others are very limited; restricted to a name and rough location only. The extremes in the detail are primarily the result of the work being undertaken with volunteers and because the frequency at which the Trust can afford to travel around the State is restricted. The comprehensively recorded cemeteries are located in areas in which the Trust has actively surveyed eg: Sydney Metropolitan, South East and the Central West region. The less detailed records have arisen out of members of the public submitting unsolicited material. We rely heavily on the community for this information, but all records still have to be verified by the Trust before we can include them into our system.

The National Trust also conducts regular education programs throughout Sydney and regional NSW. The Trust's key focus is to help communities look after their cemeteries and our experience indicates that a cemetery with a "friends" group is often better maintained. The Trust's education programs include talks, tours, practical workshops as well as advocacy and discussion through the media. The Trust has also produced the Guidelines for Cemetery Conservation, which is generally considered to be the industry standard, although not legally binding.

The National Trust's cemetery survey over the last 24 years has highlighted that the sustainability and viability of cemeteries is increasingly becoming an issue. The price of a burial falls short of the cost of the perpetual care of the grave and as such, many cemeteries, particularly in regional areas, are falling into disrepair. In addition, many are running out of space. These two issues are a major problem for a number of reasons.

- As cemeteries fall into disrepair, public safety risks increase. Cemetery managers have been known to "clean up" a cemetery, which has a negative affect on the site. "Cleaning up" usually involves removal of footstones, straightening burial rows for ease of mowing, relocating the headstones to a wall and creating a park, or removing all headstones and placing a memorial in their place.
- Although it is possible to generate money in closed or older cemeteries there is a perception that cemeteries are 'dead' spaces and no longer viable. Hence, numerous closed cemeteries have no income stream and the required maintenance falls by the wayside. This leads to further destruction, in that in the past closed cemeteries have been sold and destroyed consequently. This remains a constant pressure for small regional cemeteries. For example, the Milton Church of England cemetery was used between c1864 and 1904 and has 174 burials recorded. A good variety of headstones and monuments existed at one time. In the late 1980s, the Anglican Church disposed of its property into private hands with a covenant requiring the maintenance and conservation of graves. Despite the covenant, the new owner destroyed all evidence of the headstones and it is still unknown whether these are buried on site or have been removed. Following significant community concern a memorial wall has been erected, but this does not atone for the loss of the cemetery.
- More recently, the same concerns have been raised about the closed cemetery, St Thomas' at Narellan. The cemetery is for sale and a local community group

is particularly interested in buying the cemetery to manage it under a Trust. Inadequate finances have prevented them so far. Their interest was borne out of concerns about the intentions of potential buyers.

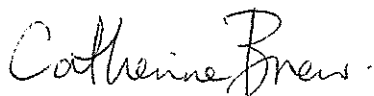
- Limited finances can cause the slow degradation of a cemetery which encourages vandalism. If not repaired, more vandalism usually follows.
- Many cemeteries include unused burial plots that are more than 60 years old. These plots can be reused, but their location is often unknown. The Trust is extremely interested in expanding its survey program to include GIS mapping for each cemetery to help us identify available unused land for future burials. The reuse of these graves would start to address the increasing space problem within the Sydney metropolitan area particularly.
- There has been some discussion in Sydney about introducing crematoriums into closed or older cemeteries to establish an income to make maintenance possible (Waverley Cemetery). Whilst a crematorium can be sited appropriately, there appears to be concerns in the community about the effects of crematoriums on public health.

The National Trust is increasingly concerned about the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority's attitude towards cemeteries. It appears that the RTA perceives cemeteries as vacant land. More and more the Trust is dealing with proposed road expansions and diversions through cemeteries, where land adjacent is vacant or potentially useable. The Trust is addressing two cases at the moment. The first is a proposal to re-route a road through an unmarked burial ground in Trewilga, regional NSW. The second case is a proposed flood evacuation route through part of one of Australia's earliest Roman Catholic cemeteries in Windsor. Despite the cemetery being of high State Significance, the proposal includes the potential for 25 graves to be lost.

The National Trust is very interested in escalating its cemetery survey work around the State. Financial constraints have prevented the purchase of equipment which has the potential to make the survey more efficient. Consequently, we are actively looking for partners to assist in gaining a complete understanding of New South Wales' cemeteries and to develop models for sustainable management. The Trust has also been working with community partners such as TAFE NSW to facilitate a monumental restoration campaign, which we anticipate will increase public awareness and help develop practical heritage management systems for cemeteries, thus reducing the cost of managing conservation.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute the Inquiry. We hope that the information included in this letter is useful. Please do not hesitate to contact the Trust if you require any further assistance.

Yours Sincerely



Catherine Brew
Conservation Officer
National Trust of Australia (NSW)

