

Death in the bush

Unravelling the mysteries of lonely graves

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When civil registration was introduced to the Australian colonies in the 1840s and 1850s, the models used were those from various countries in Britain. While the intentions were admirable, the Australian tyranny of distance and the climate meant that practice was often rather different from the expected procedure. This was very evident with remote deaths. To strictly follow the processes in the heat of summer was often quite impractical when faced with the disposal of a rapidly decaying body, let alone considering those unexpected deaths many hundreds of miles from the nearest community.

I consider a lonely grave to be a single or small group of graves outside a recognised or currently used cemetery that never had more than about twenty graves. This means that we find very isolated single burials through to the small collections at disused railway sidings, rural homesteads and long forgotten chapel sites. Lonely, however, does not mean remote. Colonel William Light the founder of Adelaide is buried in a city square but his grave is lonely in the fact that it is outside a regular cemetery. Many sites have no headstone, some are no more than rumoured graves and others are well documented, but all have a story to be told.

Colonel William Light's lonely grave in Light Square Adelaide.

In the quest to document lonely graves, the task is two fold—the first is to locate and accurately describe the site and the second is to gather up the background information about the death and the biography of the person involved. This paper addresses both exercises and in doing so will hopefully instill in the reader an interest in the hunt and an understanding of the research processes involved.

While this paper concentrates on South Australia, it is evident that the processes can be applied to the isolated graves across Australia.



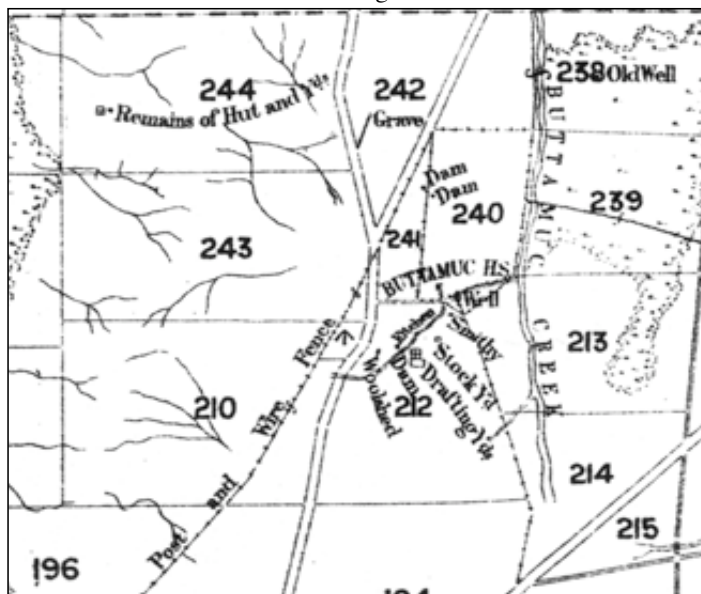
Locating and describing the graves

Lonely graves are mentioned in a multitude of places and some of these are quite unexpected. Often reports of remote deaths only imply a remote burial, but given the era and geography the burial must have been lonely. Where the author has been unable to confirm the location of these graves, they are entered into a supplementary index known as remote deaths. Trawling through the *South Australian Deaths. Indexes of registrations 1842–1915* and the District Registrars Death Records to 1980, many remote deaths are found. Unfortunately only the very modern South Australian Death Certificates record place of burial and so many of these remote deaths can only at this stage suggest a remote or isolated burial. One has to ask where was the most likely burial site for Emil Robert AHLMANN aged 25 killed in a fall down the well at Cordillo Downs Station in the remote NE corner of South Australia on 4 Jan 1884 and whose demise was listed in the Government Gazette of 25 Sep 1884 p1207a in the Police Mortuary Returns as age 30, 5 foot 10 inches tall and of medium build? Clearly one of the two station cemeteries near the old homestead is the logical answer as the nearest town was Innamincka some 120 km to the south, but neither contain a headstone for Emil. While his death was registered that gives no research aid as place of burial was not featured on South Australian certificates until 1 July 1948. Apart from searching the *South Australian Deaths. Indexes of registrations 1842–1915* by place of death using the CD-ROM version, the sources of information on the sites comes to the author in a number of other ways. Some are more useful than others although all need to be checked carefully:

- members of the public responding to the project on the web, in genealogy magazines and by word of mouth
- trawling through Police Mortuary returns in Government Gazettes
- scouring old maps held at the State Records of SA
- reading local history and family history books
- working through Public Trustee Intestate Records
- trawling Police Station Journals and files
- field visits to pastoral holdings by the author and a small team of interested supporters

Old map showing grave to north of Buttamuc homestead.

Many members of the general public share an interest in the topic and when the author can manage to get an



article or letter in a newspaper or magazine, a surge of reports result. Ironically well-known sites are rarely reported which suggests that the public thinks these are already known. Of course such an assumption can cause some problems, as what may be a well-known site at the local level may indeed be unknown to the collator. There have been a number of examples of this and no doubt there are such sites still waiting to be *discovered* by the compiler! The major issue with all sites reported is the lack of location detail. Inevitably when the compiler or one of the helpers attempts to locate the grave to take a photograph, we find the task to be far from easy. Indeed the directions in some cases are so poor and or the site is so obscure, that some sites remain un-photographed despite extensive searching. A typical example of this problem is demonstrated by the grave of Scottish emigrant, David FERGUSON a labourer of Saltia who died on 22 November 1857 of typhoid fever at the age of twenty-two years, and which is probably



in the cemetery of the now non-existent town of Saltia at the western end of Pichi Richi Pass, east of Port Augusta. No less than four separate expeditions by three different parties failed to find the grave. The fourth visit by a person with local knowledge took over an hour to locate the grave approximately 100m from the main road through the pass!

A number of reports turn out to be something else. The grave on the Williamstown to Sandy Creek road turned out to belong to a horse! Some site are just rumoured to be graves. The residence on the southeast corner of Kennedy Street and North Terrace Mundulla opposite the showgrounds gate in the front garden of the house at Lot 10 is supposed to be the burial ground for a number of stillbirths.

David Fergusson's grave.

Deaths in public places were listed in the *South Australian Government Gazette* every six months under various titles. The information in the report sometimes discloses the circumstances of the burial. Unfortunately while burial is mentioned or implied, the actual site is never made clear. Thus in the case of the unknown German male found dead 6.5 miles from Blanchetown in 1865 and buried by police, we cannot be sure if the grave of an unknown man at the junction of the Adelaide–Blanchetown road and the Sedan Road which is also about the same distance from Blanchetown. Sometimes the report can lead the researcher on to Inquest files. Unfortunately the surviving records are rather patchy due to the records from 1877 to 1930 being destroyed for the War effort. Searching early newspapers can sometimes find the report of an inquest. Certainly the inquest records for the following example have not survived:

Description of body: Appears to have been a short man, bald headed, with sandy hair & whiskers, supposed to be a German. About 40 years or upwards of age. A wedding ring on middle finger of left hand.

Circumstances attending the decease: The body was found in the scrub about 6 1/2 miles from this place. His clothes were all off, and apparently used as a bed. His swag was tied up, and complete; the clothes all German style and fashion. Money £2/10/9 in portmonnie, in trouser pocket. An address in a German book in swag, as under, "Via Victoria. Mr P Huttman Ovens District Chiltern Melbourne".

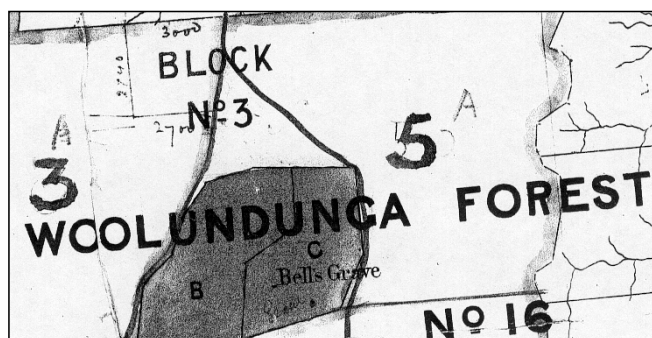
All information received by the Police: No person of the description missed from the district. Supposed to be a traveller on his way from or to Adelaide. An Inquest was held on July 1, when a verdict of found dead was returned and the remains buried.

Police - Mortuary Returns Government Gazette 4 Jan 1866 p2

Police stations also maintained Mortuary Books, which contained the entries that made up the half yearly report found in the Government Gazette. Not all the entries in the Mortuary Book got to the Government Gazette!

Fowlers Bay Police Mortuary Book (State records: GRG 5/324/3

Age 71, 6 foot 4 inches tall, dark complexion, blue eyes, dark grey hair & moustache, powerful build, disfigured mouth. Found hanged. Buried at Nundroo.



Locating graves marked on old maps is a very tedious time consuming process. It seems that only a few sites were marked and they may only appear on one edition of maps for a locality. Moreover, just spotting marked graves on detailed maps can be very difficult!

An example of a named grave on an old map.

Reading local history and family history books held by the SA Genealogy & Heraldry Society and other larger libraries can reveal graves as they are often of interest to the local historians and/or the family under study.

The Pollard family in 1862 were living in a hut near Deep Well, west of Orrie Cowie. There were three children in the family, and they had just moved up from Cottars Castle, another hut several miles south-west. Mrs Pollard had made a flourishing vegetable garden while living there, and one day, wanting

to gather some of those vegetables, left her children at home, locked in the hut, while she walked back to Cottars Castle. She returned to find the hut burnt to the ground, the children still inside. She could only start walking again, towards Orrie Cowie homestead and help. On O'Briens Hill, two or three miles west of her goal, she met a rider who was able to help her. In the manner of the time, the station people looked after their own. The three children were buried in a common grave on the top of a rise, looking towards Coutts Lagoon and Corny Point, and the stone raised to their memory reads "Henry Pollard, and brother and sister, who died as God willed it. 1862"

Warooka Historical Committee; *West of the Peesey: an account of a community : Warooka, Corny Point, Stenhouse Bay Warooka SA 1976; p4*

Like the Government Gazettes, sometimes the Public Trustee Intestate Records held by State records reveal the lonely burial and just like their counterpart, they rarely give the detail needed to find the grave site! The unknown male buried six miles northwest of Yunta is reported in such a way. Usually these entries are supported by parallel entries in other records.

Public Trustee Intestate Records GRG 33/1 I 3578

Found 28 May 1906 skeleton wearing a truss; buried on spot; possessions - £0/6/11, 1 watch & chain, 1 pocket knife, 1 pr spectacles, 1 single barrel gun with timber parts rotted away, old black pipe, all clothes scattered & rotten; no inquest; reported by Mannahill Police.

Incidentally, this event has no Death Certificate as only a Burial Order was issued. Technically the magistrate should have arranged to forward proceedings on to the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages, but clearly in this case this never eventuated. Searchers can find a number of notices in Government Gazettes reminding readers of the need to procure Death certificates indicating that this was a common problem. To date the author has located 219 unregistered deaths in South Australia which are recorded in other official records. A further 368 graves have been located for which no official record of death can be found.

The Mount Gambier Police Station Journal (State records: GRG 5/151/1 1854–1861) refers to the wreck of the *Varoon* in a number of accounts from 26 January to 1 March 1856 and variously describes the site as between Rivoli Bay and Cape Northumberland, nr Cape Northumberland, and near Lake Bonney.

27 Jan 1856

Corp Young and PT Eardley accompanied by G Glen Esqu and Mr Begg also three other gentlemen from G Glens went to the wreck where we found five dead bodies on the beach and one leg fast to one of the masts partly in the water, the leg seemed to be white with a five boot on it, one of the dead bodies was also white, a quantity of rope, sugar and coffee in mat bags was partly buried in the sand, everything else belonging to the vessel was smashed to pieces, a very great number of cigar cases full of cigars and a grate number floated in the surf, three large pigs and fowls lay among the ruins. We found the name of the vessel Varoon of Aberdeen although all hands searched diligently for the boats not the least vestige could be found and only one oar was seen.

Corp Young returned to Mr Begg same night PT Eardley got a fresh horse from Mr Glen and reached Mt Burr same night on his way for Mr Watson SM to hold an inquest. Distance horse Buffalo 30 miles, Jack 35 miles

28 Jan 1856

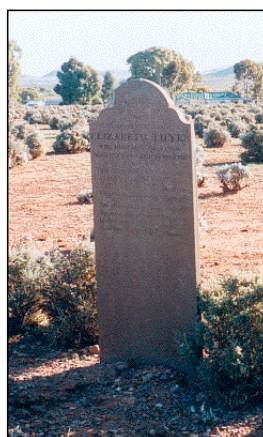
Corp Young at wreck and the tide was very high and took a considerable part of the wreck out to sea.

The Guichen Bay Police Station Journal (State records: GRG 5/159/2) refers to officers visiting the wreck in January and February 1856.

The Colonial Secretary's Office Inward Correspondence file (State records: GRG 24/6 A (1856) 599) contains a letter from a GB Scott regarding mails recovered from the wreck of the ship *Varoon* dated 18 Feb 1856 and reporting that the wreck occurred five to six weeks earlier with all hands lost and a number of bodies being found.

Local knowledge is important. Station managers can be very helpful when visited and many have an interest in the sites on their property and want to know more. Some stations have retained their records that provide much detail. Sometimes all that is known can be found on the headstone. Elizabeth Thyer age 19, daughter of James and Hannah nee Wall died 29 December 1869 at Teetulpa Station near Yunta, a death never registered but reported in the newspaper. (*Register* newspaper 6 Jan 1870)

*Sacred to the memory of
Elizabeth Thyer
Who died Dec 29th, 1869
Aged 19 years & 10 months
Pass a few swiftly fleeting years,
and all that now in bodies live,
shall quit like me, this vest of tears,
their righteous sentence to receive.
But all before they hence remove
my mansions for themselves prepare
in that eternal home above,
and O my God shall I be there.*



Locating the background information

There were rules about reporting a death and gaining permission for a burial. Sometimes distance and remoteness made these rules impractical and expedience took over.

Technically no deceased person could be buried without the presentation of a Death Certificate, a Burial Order or a court order. All rather impractical in the remote parts of the colony as only certain persons were qualified to prepare these documents and they certainly were not always near at hand! Many bodies were actually buried without due ceremony and there are examples of disinterment when the nearest police officer finally arrived on the scene. Many travellers carried no identification and will remain unknown. Some effort is put into identifying the people involved.



A grave located west of Mannahill in paddock known as Snaky nr Snaky Bore on the former coach road from Manna Hill to Winnininnie has a simple concrete headstone inscribed, *Julius Reiman Died 1878*. Research has enabled a full picture of the man to be developed. The Mannahill Police Inquest Book (GRG 5/277/2) contains the entry:

28 Dec 1886; No Inquest; Julius REIMANN age 55, 5'4", stoutish build, brown hair turning grey. moustache turning grey; found on Winninnie Track 5 m from Mannahill by Chas Johnson; no inquest; bu. order; books and papers showed name and wife with family of North terrace Adelaide SA; buried on spot

Possible references to Carl Julius Edmund REIMANN's six children and wife were found by referring to the *South Australian Birth Indexes of registrations 1842–1906*. No marriage record in was located in the *South Australian Marriage Indexes of registrations 1842–1916* or Lutheran Church Archive records and nor were we able to account for why the man was in the district save that the area was riddle with gold prospectors and he may have been trying to make his fortune.

What is the motivation for collecting this information?

Basically as a family historian I am interested in tracing the lives of people. Many people just seem to disappear off the face of the earth! Given the early frontier conditions of South Australia last century, no doubt many were buried where they died. Some have been recorded and others have not. For example some of the colony's earliest graves were located in the sand-hills at present day North

Glenelg—long built over and forgotten.

The collection is not restricted to confirmed graves but also contains suspected gravesites even though the site may only be rumoured to have been a grave. Sometimes we are able to help people resolve the family myth and on one occasion a rumoured grave proved to be factual when our research and the input of another person was able to put the jigsaw together! Scattered ashes are not included unless a specific memorial has been erected in the vicinity. Other monuments and memorials are not included.

The Adelaide *Advertiser* published a letter on 19 Jan 1995 about a year after the collection was started and this effort located some 400 gravesites previously unknown by many researchers. Apart from this we have searched local history books, Public Trustee Intestate Records, Police Station Journals and files, Government Gazettes and visited pastoral holdings throughout South Australia. Since placing the index online at < www.on.net/users/proformat/graves.html > in 1996 many more sites have been revealed and the revelations continue to this day.

What do I do with the information?

On receipt of a submission, we research the individual/s and complete a biography of the person. This information is made readily available to any enquirer and the whole set (current as at mid 2002) can be purchased from *Gould Genealogy*.

Family historians who have lost an ancestor and have recognised the name in the published index can easily access the material. The greatest response in this regard comes via the Internet. Others find their relative listed and happily supply further biographical data. The list is located at: < www.graves.jaunay.com.html >

All requests for further information on any graves listed are freely given.

If you know of a lonely grave the author would be delighted to hear from you. You can contact him at:

1. graham@jaunay.com
- 2: complete a form at: < www.graves.jaunay.com.html >
- 3: write to 7 East terrace South Plympton SA 5038