

## BDA Source Description Pages

<http://www.bda-online.org.au>**Sydney Burial Ground – Monumental Inscriptions – Transcribed in 1969**

The Title page from the following book reads:

*Sydney Burial Ground 1819-1901 (Elizabeth and Devonshire Streets) and History of Sydney's Early Cemeteries from 1788* by Keith A. Johnson and Malcolm R. Sainty. published by the Library of Australian History, Sydney 2001.

The book includes a comprehensive history of the cemetery.

One of the main sections of the book deals with the Monumental Inscriptions that were transcribed in 1969-1970 by Johnson and Sainty at Bunnerong Cemetery where they had been relocated from the Sydney Burial Ground in 1901.

The following history of this process, taken from the book, is reproduced below. The book also contains copies of documents and photographs relating to the process.

It is copyright.

---

**Monumental Inscriptions**

The total number of monuments erected in the Sydney Burial Ground will never be known with complete accuracy, but it was in excess of 4,500. It is estimated that at least two-thirds of the total remaining in 1901 were relocated at Bunnerong at government expense. Only five of these were marble, the rest were locally hewn sandstone. It is evident from other old cemeteries that marble was infrequently used prior to the 1880s. As many as 5,000 memorial stones, ranging from humble markers to lavish and ornate monuments were probably erected in the various portions of the Burial Ground during the years 1819-1888. Despite the ravages of time and the elements, and the relocation of the monuments in 1901, a fine collection of memorials to many of Sydney's pioneers and to early stonemasons' skills have survived to the present day in a number of metropolitan and country cemeteries. By 1970 the monuments at Bunnerong varied from totally obliterated by weathering and pollution, to good condition.

The Johnson/Sainty transcription was compiled from the inscriptions on the monuments removed from the Sydney Burial Ground to Bunnerong Cemetery and record 2,825 full or partial inscriptions that were deciphered by Malcolm Sainty and

## BDA Source Description Pages

<http://www.bda-online.org.au>

Keith Johnson during the years 1969 and 1970, initially on a tape recorder and then transcribed into a book. In some instances it was possible to check inscriptions with earlier transcripts made in 1900-1901 and 1914 respectively. Mr. and Mrs. A.G. Foster, Foundation members of the [Royal] Australian Historical Society, transcribed 617 inscriptions from the 1,229 monuments in the Church of England (Episcopalian) portion prior to their removal early in 1901, from the Elizabeth Street site. Their meticulous work is beautifully recorded with full transcripts of inscriptions in an Epitaph Book and five volumes of photographs in the Mitchell Library, Sydney.<sup>80</sup> Unfortunately, the Fosters transcribed less than one hundred inscriptions in the other portions. Mr. Alfred Potter's Notebooks contain a considerable amount of data from monuments also in the Church of England portion which he collected at Bunnerong in 1914.

Following the Johnson/Sainty initial transcription of the monuments, the draft transcript was then checked on site, row by row, against the monuments and checked also where possible with inscriptions recorded in newspaper articles and elsewhere before, during and since the 1901 exhumations and removal operations. Where there was disagreement, data collected was compared with particulars recorded in the Re-Interment Register. The Botany Cemetery Trust during 1973 consolidated the area occupied by the Old Devonshire Street monuments into a Pioneer Memorial Park close to Bunnerong Road. Approximately 800 representative stones were selected for inclusion. In accordance with the legislation the Botany Cemetery Trust sought the views of the Historic Graves Committee of the Royal Australian Historical Society concerning the stones to be preserved in the Pioneers Memorial Park at Botany Cemetery: The Compilers of this volume were members of this Committee and provided for the Committee particulars of almost 800 historic monuments and examples of early stone masons' skills - quaint and finely cut lettering or verses. Details from only a small proportion of the stones selected are detailed here. Four-fifths of the remaining stones were in poor condition as will be seen from the code following each inscription and scarcely capable of preservation.

According to "Old Chum" No. 154 - *The Truth* 18 September 1910 Mrs. Louisa Watkins was the last person interred in the Burial Ground. However, her date of death was not given and her death is not recorded on her monument (No. 315 - Church of England portion) on which inscriptions appear for her daughter (1836), her husband (1842), brother (1846) and father-in-law (1846). Mrs. Watkins applied for a License to Bury John Rochester Sullivan in her family vault on 16 February 1885.

The Robinson/Marr and Bunker/Fisk vaults also had later interments that were not recorded on the monumental inscription. Henry E. Fisk who died on 5 February 1887 and was buried in the Bunker/Fisk vault (No. 119 - Church of England portion) was not recorded nor was colonial born Mrs. Ann Marr who died on 29 September 1848 aged 48 years. She was the widow of Ezekiel Wood and Henry Marr and daughter of Edward and Mary Robinson who are all recorded on an old monument (No. 35 -

## BDA Source Description Pages

<http://www.bda-online.org.au>

Church of England portion), in 1969 almost completely indecipherable. There are many other examples including the Hallorans (No. 155 - Church of England portion), Richard Cheers' family (No. 447 - Church of England portion), and Maurice Reynolds a solicitor who was buried, following his sister's application for a license on 17 May 1878, in a vault (No. 1200 - Roman Catholic portion) with his parents who had been buried in 1832 and 1841 respectively.

There have been differences, especially in the numerals, deciphered by the Compilers of the transcripts (Appendix 3) and particulars previously collected from the stones by others. The most frequent variation has been between '3' and '5' or '1' and '4'. An exaggerated example of a variation would be 14 December 1835 instead of 11 September 1853. Therefore the condition of the stone as indicated by the code at the end of each inscription should be taken into account when considering the accuracy of the transcription. The type of sandstone used in the 1830s, usually whitish grey in colour, was generally a better quality than that used in the 1850s, normally reddish in colour, softer and more prone to weathering and eventual disintegration. There are certain aids in distinguishing stones of the different periods, including the style of lettering used and the way in which the stones were chipped and shaped. The backs of upright stones were in the main roughly chipped until about 1840.

The monuments in the Church of England portion (i.e. the oldest monuments) as a whole were the best preserved. The sandstone used prior to 1850 was certainly harder (probably Pymont sandstone, whitish in colour) and the lettering, in most cases, more distinctly cut. These stones, due to their location near Bunnerong Road, were also the least affected by the salt air and especially the fumes emitted from the adjoining oil refinery chimneys during the 1950s and 1960s. These elements seriously eroded many later stones in the other portions. The masons' styles, the weathering of the stones, the angle of the sun at the time of transcription all play a part in making collection of inscriptions a difficult task. In most cases the Compilers placed square brackets in the transcript, around the part of the inscription that was difficult to decipher. It is important to treat doubtful inscriptions recorded in Appendix 3, as a guide to research. Only one figure may be incorrect: it is necessary to compare details with official, death or burial records.

Two monuments (No. 127 and 686 - Church of England portion) record the death, of William Chapman in June 1810, the former, the older slab, was probably brought from the George Street Ground with his remains after his name had been inscribed on the new stone erected in 1823 for his son's parents-in-law. The older stone was transcribed in 1901 by Mr A.G. Foster:-

"Sacred to the memory of Mr. William Chapman, plumber and glazier, who departed this life June .1 5, 1810, aged 45 years, and has left a disconsolate widow with 9 children."

## BDA Source Description Pages

<http://www.bda-online.org.au>

---

For other 'Cemetery Records' included in the BDA see

<http://www.bda-online.org.au/sources/cemeteries>

Historical resources available from the BDA Shop

<http://www.bda-online.org.au/shop>

These Information pages are copyright. Any request to reproduce them should be directed to BDA.