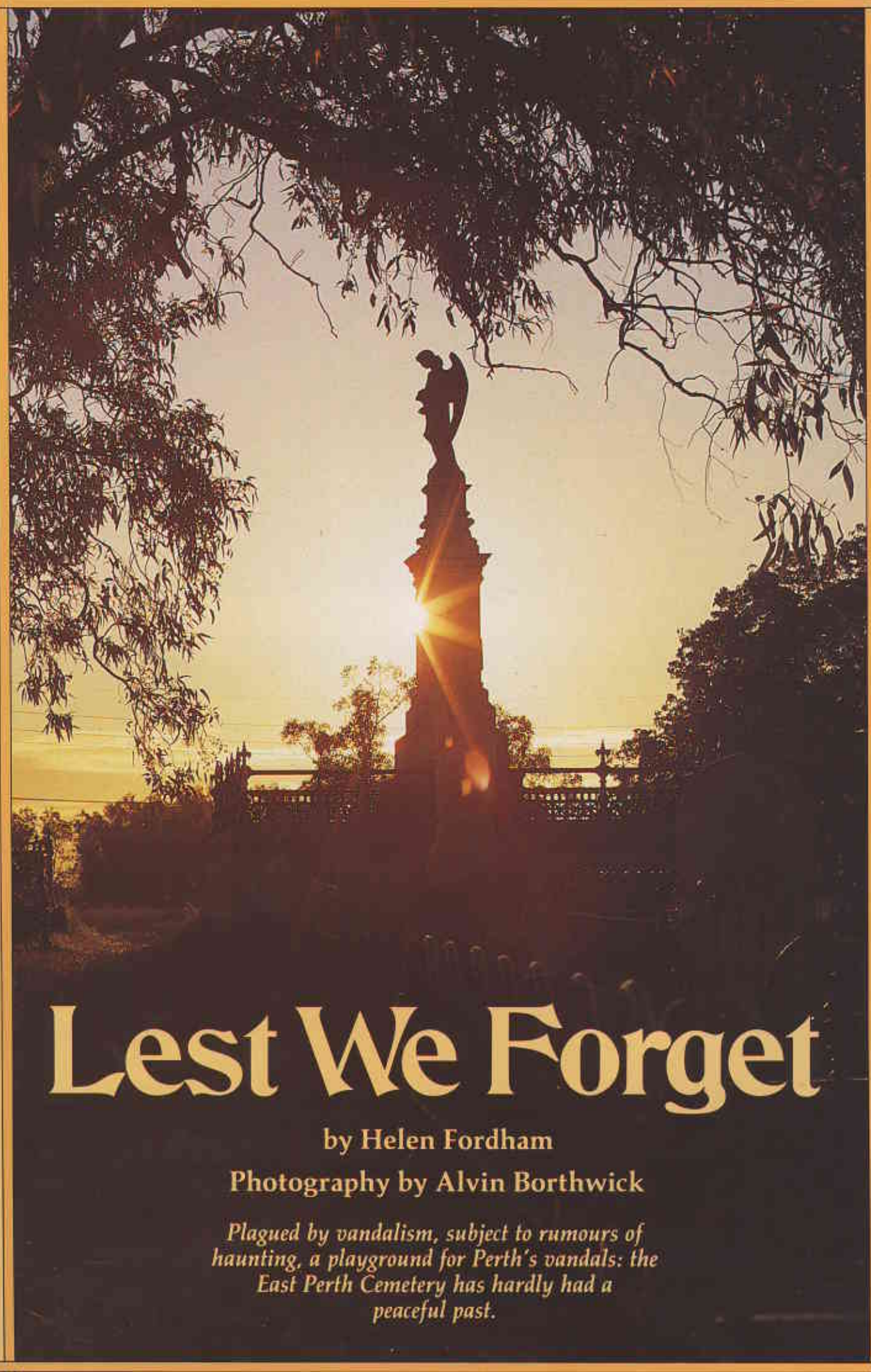


Lest We Forget

by Helen Fordham

Photography by Alvin Borthwick

Plagued by vandalism, subject to rumours of haunting, a playground for Perth's vandals: the East Perth Cemetery has hardly had a peaceful past.

Surrounded by highrises and urban sprawl, this anachronistic graveyard serves to remind us of our past. In just five hectares of land an estimated 10 000 pioneers are buried, including the well known settlers John Septimus Roe, Sir Luke Leake and Peter Broun.

The East Perth Cemetery was first surveyed in 1829 following instructions to Captain James Stirling from George Murray, who was the Secretary of State for the colonies. The first recorded burial was a Private John Mitchell of the 63rd Regiment in 1830, and the oldest surviving tombstone belongs to Louisa Jones who was interred the same year. The ground, however, was not gazetted as a public cemetery until 1847.

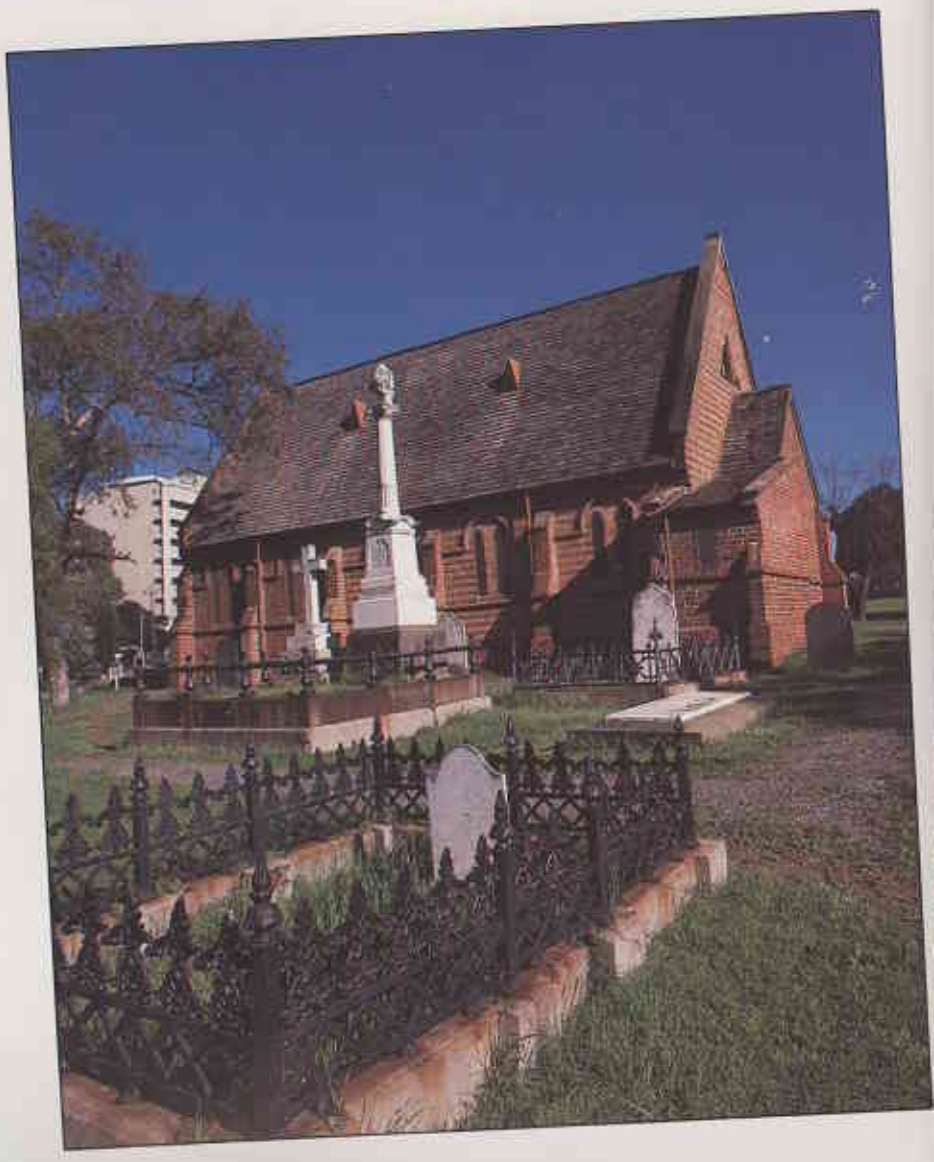
Like most cemeteries, it was divided into sections for different religious denominations, such as Jewish, Church of England, Roman Catholic. The neo-Gothic style St Bartholomew's church, built in the Protestant section in 1871, was used as a mortuary chapel.

As well as different religious sections, however, there were separate sections for Aborigines and Chinese. A sign of the times. There was even a place for felons and the promiscuous, which, needless to say, was occupied very quickly.

Most of the people who died in Perth between 1830 and 1899 were buried in East Perth. By 1899 the cemetery was filled to capacity, and there was some concern about its location so close to residential areas. Burials were discontinued there, except in vaults, and Karrakatta was opened in 1900.

The tomb of Panter, Harding and Goldwyer, who were killed by Aborigines at Le Grange in 1864. (right)

The oldest surviving tombstone, which belongs to Louisa Jones, who was buried in 1830. (below)



This neo-Gothic building was the mortuary chapel for Protestants. (right)

During the early years of the 20th century the cemetery fell into a state of disrepair: wooden headboards had decayed, marble monuments were discoloured and the stonework and ironwork were frequently pillaged. Due to the efforts of the Historical Society, the cemetery was vested in the State Gardens Board in 1934.

The late 1940s saw a renewed interest in the cemetery after Sir Paul Hasluck, whose father was buried there, expressed his concern at the neglect of such an important historical site. Sir Paul enlisted the aid of Herb Graham, MLA and Premier Ross McLarty, and they arranged for the restoration of several graves.

Perth by this time was expanding at a fast pace, stretching tentacles of urbanism across the countryside. Between 1948 and 1950 the cemetery west of Plain St was bulldozed, and the area excised for development. This caused a public outcry at the time because the bodies of the dead had not been exhumed, and several human bones were found lying around the area, much to the outrage of local schools. A girls' school was built on the site, which later became Traffic Control Headquarters. In 1959 the National Parks Board became 'Keepers of the Dead'.

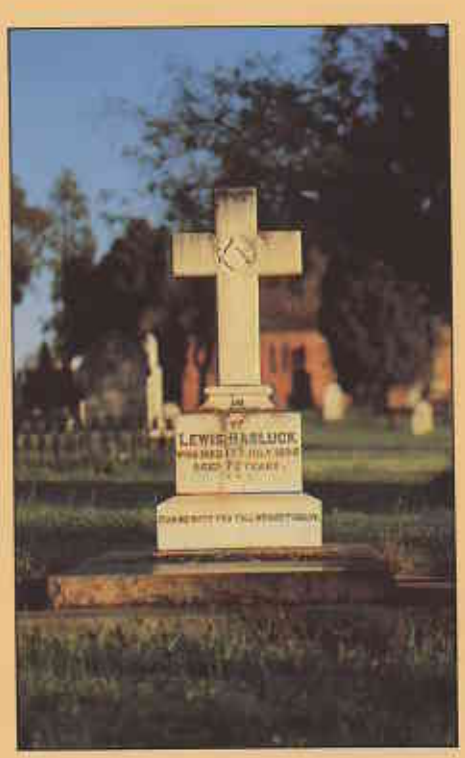
We will never know the names of most of those buried in the cemetery. Only 804 sites out of thousands are still identifiable. The countless mounds remain nameless. Many of the burials were simple affairs, the passing of a soul marked by a single wooden cross. Those of more means could afford a greater chance of 'immortality': elaborate memorials resplendent with wrought iron railings and marble angels were better able to withstand the ravages of time, albeit they were more of an attraction for vandals and souvenir hunters.

The peaceful green sward and the ominous chimney are reminiscent of Thomas Hardy's accounts of the industrial revolution (above).

City contrasts (below).

Death is a great leveller, and rich and poor were susceptible to the same diseases and accidents. According to Mrs Ray Oldham, of the W.A. Historical Society, there was an alarming death rate from typhoid, malnutrition, scurvy and dysentry. Many perished in drowning accidents, like Bertie Wittenoom, who drowned in the Swan in 1892, at the age of ten. There was a very high child mortality rate, and a very high percentage of young women died in childbirth. Several soldiers and convicts are buried in East Perth, bearing mute testimony to our penal history. The cemetery is also the final resting place of explorers Panter, Harding and Goldwyer, who were killed by Aborigines at Le Grange in 1864.

In 1984 the National Parks Authority was integrated with the Forests Department and the Wildlife Section of the Fisheries and Wildlife Department to form CALM, which now has responsibility for the area. CALM, together with the Historical Society, has been working to restore the cemetery. Widespread vandalism necessitated the erection of a permanent fence, before the Historical Society could take advantage of a $5 000 W.A. Heritage Committee grant for restoring the cemetery.



The gravestone of Lewis Hasluck, father of Sir Paul Hasluck. (above)

The Historical Society has long been interested in the future of the cemetery, and in 1987 Dr James Richardson and CALM Ranger David Davies completed a 3 part journal which listed all those interred. Mrs Ray Oldham, who initiated the cemetery restoration project in 1983, is currently working on a book detailing the history of the area, and providing over 5 000 brief biographies of those buried in the cemetery. A memorial service is held by the Society every year on the first Sunday in June 'lest we forget' our forebears.

Perhaps at last, on this little green hill in the shadow of the city of Perth, our pioneering ancestors can rest in peace.□

'When curfew tolls the knell of parting day . . .'

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COVER PHOTO:
Stark silhouettes evoke the spirit of our remote regions. This photograph was taken near Quairading by Hans Versluis.

EDITORIAL

Public participation in land management sounds like a great idea: the community has a chance to study and comment upon the government's proposals. The scientists and managers can keep their fingers on the pulse of public demand. But sometimes good ideas are hard to put into practice.

Last April the Department of Conservation and Land Management released draft management plans for the south-west forest regions, and a draft timber strategy for W.A. The release of the plans was accompanied by a series of workshops and public meetings, and extensive media releases. Four hundred and thirty-five letters offering briefings and speakers were sent out. Ninety groups responded. Public comment on any aspect of the plans and the strategy was invited.

4070 responses were received. This included 3505 proformas (from 30 organisations) and 565 substantial submissions, some up to 200 pages in length. Many submissions endorsed the plans in their entirety; some rejected them out of hand; others suggested hundreds of minor changes.

How can so many, and such varied, views possibly be integrated simply and sensibly into a final plan? What weighting should be given to the views of different groups or individuals? Who decides what is 'right' when pure value judgements are to be made and values are in conflict? How should one resolve an issue when the views of a large section of the public are quite different from those of a small group of scientists working closely on the problem? These questions represent the sharp end of public participation. It's a relatively new game for W.A.'s land managers, and one in which the rules are still unwritten and ill-defined.

What is certain is that the Department's policy and planning staff have a big job ahead of them, and a job which must be done to the highest possible professional standard. It is important that the final plans for our south-west forests reflect the tremendous thought, effort and interest shown by the community; and it is essential that there are efficient mechanisms for public involvement in conservation and land management, because these processes will be the norm, not the exception in years ahead.

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