

VANDALS STRIKE

Historic WA churchyard desecrated

Headstones which are part of WA's history were toppled and smashed by vandals last weekend at the State's pioneer cemetery in East Perth.

In the worst incident of vandalism at the cemetery for several years four large headstones were smashed to the ground and many others chipped and broken.

The incident took place during the weekend which celebrated the anniversary of the State's foundation.

The cemetery was established in 1829, the foundation year of the Swan River Colony.

It is in Plain St. near the Police Traffic headquarters and Gloucester Park trotting track.

Vandalism has been a problem for many years and it first came to public notice in the 1940s when steps were taken to restore the cemetery after years of neglect.

Lawns have been planted and a full-time gardener-caretaker is employed to keep the cemetery and the tiny St. Bartholomew's Church in order.

Since the cemetery was restored it has been menaced by vandals.

Inscriptions in the many headstones read like a history book . . . Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Clarke, a State Governor who died in 1947 . . . Peter Broun, first Colonial Secretary . . . John Septimus Roe, the State's first surveyor general . . . George Leake, a former State Premier.

The 15-acre cemetery is classed as an A-reserve and comes under the National Parks Board.

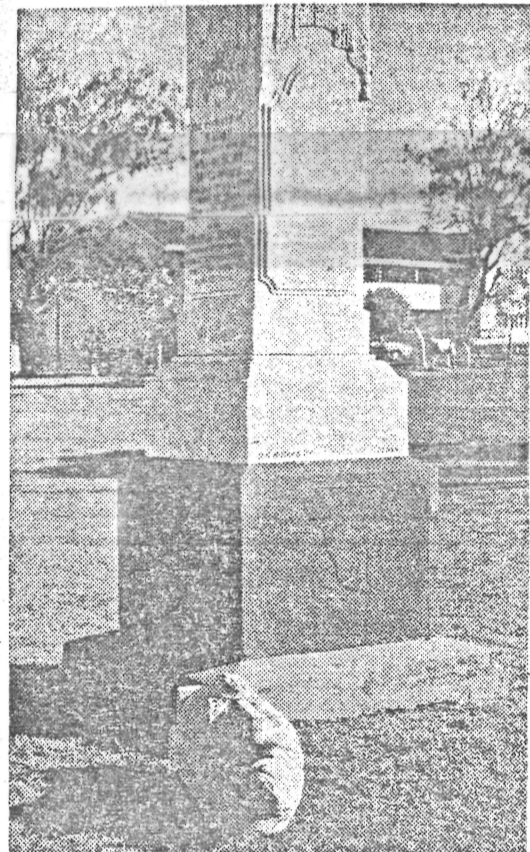
As a man is in attendance at the cemetery during the week the vandalism occurs on weekends.

"We have had a constant problem with vandals," Mr. H. Gorringe, National Parks Board administration officer said this week when he inspected the damage.

"All the breakages in the cemetery are results of vandalism over the years," he said.

"And its not only the headstones which have been hit. Windows and walls of the church have been broken and damaged."

"There is another type of vandalism in the cemetery," Mr. Gorringe said.



The top of a tall piece of statuary has been knocked off.

"On trot nights people have been driving through the cemetery, over graves, headstones and lawns to park near the entrance of Gloucester Park and save a walk."

"We can stop this damage through prosecution."

The cemetery is now being surveyed to mark the boundaries of the areas where the Perth City Council or the Parks Board are able to prosecute.

"The vandalism is not just the work of kids," Mr. Gorringe said.

"It would take two or three men to pull down and break some of the

heavy marble headstones."

The managing secretary of the National Parks Board, Mr. H. E. Bancroft, said the board had few funds to repair the damage.

"Vandalism has caused hundreds of dollars worth of damage in the cemetery," he said.

"We haven't the money for what is an unnecessary expense."

"I cannot see what vandals get from their work. I am sure they are mentally diseased."

In the past few weeks police have patrolled the cemetery but have had little success in their search for the vandals.



A 73-year-old tombstone is broken in two.