



The Catholic  
*historic*  
Walk Guide

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Catholic Cemeteries  
& Crematoria



Catholic Cemeteries & Crematoria  
in collaboration with The Friends of Rookwood  
[http:// friendsofrookwoodinc.org.au](http://friendsofrookwoodinc.org.au)





### 1 START OF THE WALK

This self-guided Historical Walk through the Catholic Section of Mortuary 1 will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Along the way you will visit imposing monuments embodying architectural, social, religious features as well as the history behind them.

This walk will journey past the imposing Maher Cross to the Gothic Revival architecture of St Michael the Archangel Chapel offering a peek into Christian Symbolism and the majestic Vaults of successful families.

We hope you will find the walk an informative and enjoyable experience.

### 1 THE TOOHEY FAMILY VAULTS

In 1869 John Toohey set up an auctioneering agency and cordial manufacturing business in Sydney. The following year, John and his brother James began brewing at the Metropolitan Brewery. In 1873 the brothers bought the Darling Brewery located in Cockle Creek, later named Darling Harbour. Before 1880 imported beer was preferred to the local product, but in the 1880s Toohey's beer quickly became popular.

James went on to hold the Legislative Assembly seat of South Sydney from 1885 to 1893. He was a good speaker, if a little impetuous at times. On James's death in 1895, John took over the brewery. John was a leading Catholic layman, benefactor to numerous Catholic charitable institutions and a financial supporter of the Irish nationalist movement. On Christmas Day 1888 Cardinal Patrick Moran invested him as a knight of the Order of St Gregory.

In 1902 the brewery became a public company, Tooheys Limited, with John as chairman. John went on a world tour with his family in 1902. He died in Chicago USA on 5 May 1903. His body was returned to Australia and was buried in the Catholic section of Rookwood cemetery, Sydney.

*Reference: Australian Dictionary of Biography*

### 2 THE MAHER FAMILY VAULT

Timothy Maher was a merchant and furniture manufacturer who ran Moore's Labour Bazaar in Pitt Street Sydney during the 1850's and 60's. It was the largest general furnishing store in any of the Australian colonies at that time.

Perhaps the most outstanding monument at Rookwood Cemetery is the gigantic Celtic cross erected over this vault. At the intersection of the arms of the cross there is carved the symbol of the Holy Ghost descending in the form of the dove. On

each arm of the cross is carved a symbol of one of the Evangelists, viz., an angel's head representing St Matthew; a winged lion St Mark; a bull St Luke; and eagle, St. John. The remaining portions contain beautiful interlacing of ribbons and animals – snakes and dogs with topknots and intertwining together in the most fantastic manner.

This grand monument indicated the morality and respectability of the work and thrift that made it possible. These ideas developed from what has been termed by historians as the "Victorian work ethic". While the Celtic cross was often used by the Irish Catholic element in Australian society, Maher's elaborate representation was again the affirmation of a successful man.

*Reference: "The Sleeping City"*

### 3 THE SLOVENE MONUMENTAL LAWN

Settlers from Slovenia have been arriving in Australia since the mid nineteenth century, when it was part of the Hapsburg Empire. Slovene territory joined the Kingdoms of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918, renamed Yugoslavia in 1929. During World War II the nation was invaded and fractured, but after the war Slovenia re-joined Yugoslavia.

After Slovenia became independent from Yugoslavia in 1991, the number of Slovenian immigrants settling in New South Wales declined. The Slovenian population of Australia has been estimated to total about 25,000.

Many organisations and social centres have been formed by first generation Slovenes as the place for Slovenian community activities, festivals, cherished Slovenian traditions and customs.

This small ethnic burial area with its well-kept graves and abundance of floral decorations, photographs etc., shows in clear relief the changing face of modern day ethnic burial area when compared against the surrounding nineteenth century public and religious burial areas.

*Reference: "The Sleeping City"*

### 4 THE SERPENTINE CANAL

One of the focal points of the Rookwood Cemetery landscaping is the Serpentine Canal.

It is an open brick-lined drain, which, like a snake, weaves its way across the centre of Rookwood Cemetery and is crossed at regular intervals by cast iron and wrought iron bridges.

The Serpentine Canal is an engineering feat and technically very important.

The drains are made of sandstone bricks hand-made to English size specifications, indicating that construction of the Serpentine drain pre-dates

1890. The drains are 900mm wide by 1.7 metres deep.

The Flemish bonding pattern forms a series of decorative crosses in the wall and is suitable for the construction of curved walls.

Brick spreaders have been used at intervals throughout the drainage system to prevent the walls collapsing under the pressure of the surrounding soil.

### 5 THE McMAHON VAULT

JAMES (Jimmy) McMAHON (1838-1914) was born in County Clare Ireland and migrated to Sydney with his family when he was 9. He started his working life aged 13, assisting a baker who paid seven shillings a week. He was next employed as a carrier for a wine and spirit merchant, acquiring a basic knowledge of the industry.

McMahon launched his own cartage business and several years later contracted for the cartage of copper from the Peak Downs fields.

Returning to Sydney in 1864 he held an exclusive contract with the New South Wales railways, delivering wool to warehouses from the Darling Harbour rail siding. In 1890 to 1892 McMahon was the first president of the Master Carriers' Association of New South Wales. By 1914 he had 250 teams and 550 horses - said to be the biggest fleet in the southern hemisphere. He reputedly transported 750,000 bales of wool annually.

Jimmy McMahon died on 17 November 1914 at his home in Redfern and after a requiem mass was buried in the Catholic section of Rookwood cemetery.

*Reference: Australian Dictionary of Biography*

### 6 CATHOLIC SYMBOLISM (W.H.FARNE FAMILY GRAVE)

In the Victorian age, monumental funerary figures generally assumed standing positions and were mostly female which signified a message of resurrection, reincarnation, faith and hope.

The monument of Mary standing on the head of the snake with an apple in its mouth displays some very important Christian symbols which many will already know. Rarely though are they seen in such a stark juxtaposition.

The figure of Mary is a communal symbol which affirms the dignity of the human body, and strengthens our faith in the resurrection of Christ. Mary gives hope, faith and love to the people of the world.

The Serpent beneath Mary's foot represents Satan, a deadly, subtle, malicious enemy. The Apple

located in the mouth of the serpent is also referred to as the Forbidden fruit symbolizing sin. Below the snake is an orb representing the world.

Another important Christian symbol which appears between the statue and the memorial is "IHS", which stands for the first three letters of Jesus' name in the Greek alphabet.

### 7 DEVONSHIRE STREET CEMETERY (PATRICK MOORE FAMILY GRAVE)

By the early 1840s, the Devonshire Street Cemetery was becoming overcrowded and the need for a new cemetery was recognised by church and civil authorities. In 1861 some 688 hectares, situated at Liberty Plains, 18 kilometres from Sydney, was purchased by the Government. By 1866, land had been cleared and construction of the new cemetery at Haslem's Creek was ready to begin.

Once the Haslem's Creek Necropolis was operational, newspaper advertisements were placed by Sydney City Council asking relatives of the deceased of the old Devonshire Street Cemetery to come

forward if they required their ancestors' remains to be moved to Rookwood or a cemetery of their choice. All remains were exhumed in 1901. This was done at no cost to the relatives. However if no relatives came forward, headstones and remains were sent to Botany Cemetery.

A large monument with dates going back to 1816 is from one of the graves moved to Rookwood in 1901 from the Devonshire Street Cemetery. This was done to allow for the construction of Sydney's Central Railway Station. This monument stands over the grave of Patrick and Rose Moore and their family.

*Reference: "The Sleeping City"*

### 8 THE SINKING OF THE KUTTABUL

In June 1942 Japanese submarines attacked Sydney Harbour - the prize target being an American heavy cruiser, the USS Chicago.

At about 12.30 am on 1 June 1942, there was an explosion on the naval depot ship HMAS Kuttabul, a converted harbour ferry, which was moored at Garden Island as an accommodation vessel. The crew of the midget submarine from M-24 had fired at the USS Chicago but missed, the torpedo striking the Kuttabul instead.

The explosion created a massive hole in the ferry's hull, near the stern. The initial impact thrust the vessel high into the air, whereupon it came crashing back and collapsed on the seabed. Nineteen Australian and two British sailors on the Kuttabul died.

The Catholic Sailors who perished in that attack and who are interred in these graves are:

- ❖ John Edward GANNON, Stoker,
- ❖ Leonard Walter HOWROYD, Petty Officer
- ❖ Kenneth Francis KILLEEN, Stoker II Class

*Reference: Heritage Branch of the Department of Planning NSW*

### 9 ITALIAN VAULTS

Both the trend to represent the country of origin along with the concept of a small temple is particularly evident in the numerous vaults built for Italian families in the Catholic section.

Photographs of family members interred in the tomb are attached to the facade.

The shape of these edifices resembles a small house and they are grouped in streets as in European cemeteries. A sense of family solidarity and dynastic continuity is evident in decisions to spend large sums of money on these mausolea. Allied to this philosophy of perpetuating familial ties is the Christian belief in the sanctity of the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit and a conviction that the body will be resurrected on the 'last day'.

The rationale is not entirely religious and includes an attraction to black as a colour associated with death. (Another large section of family vaults and above ground tombs can be found in Mortuary 2.)

A photograph of the deceased close to the shrine symbolically ensures closeness to the Saints in the next life.

*Reference: "The Sleeping City"*

### 10 THE SISTERS OF CHARITY

In 1815 Mary Aikenhead founded the Sisters of Charity in Ireland. Their ministry was to serve the poor in their homes and especially those who were sick. In 1838 five Sisters of Charity arrived in Sydney and were the first religious sisters to arrive in Australia. Their first Ministry was to the convict women in the Female Factory at Parramatta.

From these beginnings the Sisters of Charity have continued to answer the call to minister in schools, hospitals, prisons and social welfare activities in the wider community. They have remained in education on the East Coast of Australia and have been involved in Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Institutes. Inspired by their founder, the Sisters of Charity have had a tradition of over 150 years of leadership and innovation in Health Care, Aged Care, Research and Education in Australia.

The Sisters of Charity Health Service is now the largest non-government, not-for-profit health care provider in Australia including St Vincent's Hospitals

in Melbourne and Sydney. The driving force for their ministry is their motto: The love of Christ impels us. *Reference: Sisters of Charity Australia*

### 11 SAINT MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL CHAPEL

The Chapel of St Michael the Archangel was designed in the mid 1880's and survives as a fine example of a Gothic Revival style. It features eleven exquisite stained-glass windows, depicting the four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John as well as St Brigid, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Our Lady of Sorrows, Jesus on the Cross, St Joseph, the Immaculate Conception and St Patrick.

The original statue of St Michael the Archangel which stood surmounting the bellcote was destroyed by lightning and a smaller replacement statue was installed in the 1960's. In January 1995 the smaller statue was again struck by lightning and partially destroyed.

Two large angels of Hope and Charity enhance the front facade above the main entrance doorway. Elegant niches either side of the door reputedly were to contain statues of the blessed Virgin and St Joseph. These were never provided. A crypt area beneath the apse was used for storage of coffins arriving by train while awaiting prayers or masses and thence burial.

Extensive restoration, particularly to the slate roof and maintenance of the stone and timber work was carried out in 1989-1990, just prior to the Chapel's centenary celebrations. Masses and funeral prayers continue to be conducted in the chapel. A new bronze statue of St Michael was erected in 2009.

### 12 MORTUARY 1 STATION

Rookwood was served by a rail spur from the main line from 1867 until 1948. The Haslem's Creek Receiving House (Mortuary 1 Station) was a beautiful sandstone building, spanning the terminus of the branch line and a 30 metre section of the two platforms.

At the southern end, there was a symmetrical five sided apse-like extension which was used as a waiting room. As the train was backed in through the northern arch with the hearse leading, the coffins could be removed in complete shelter inside the building.

The rail line was used to convey funeral parties to Rookwood until 1948 when the expanded use of processions by road made it obsolete.

*We hope you enjoyed our historic walk.*