



# Raves from the Graves

## President's Report

Welcome to the summer edition of our Newsletter and greetings to all of our new members. This has been an exciting, interesting, stressful and rewarding year for the Committee of The Friends. We had our big event in March, the 150th at Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery, which included the 100th for Gallipoli, and now we are industriously researching to bring you new tours in 2016. My fellow Committee members have been outstanding in their commitment and diligence throughout the year. They are a fantastic group of people to work alongside, giving up personal time to assist in whatever needs to be done and I thank them for all their hard work and efforts.

The 150th has renewed interest for many people within the community, which heartens us, as a group, because the aim of The Friends is to promote interest in these beautiful old cemeteries. The Friends have also re-established good working relationship with the Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust (SMCT) and our associated Friends groups - as we are all working towards the same aims. Brighton General Cemetery & St. Kilda Cemetery are beautiful old graveyards, which face the same issues as we do at Cheltenham Pioneer, in particular, so a cohesive, unified group makes sense for us all.

The Friends of Cheltenham Regional Cemeteries has started on its reintroduction of tours/walks. So far there has been two successful walks with all of the hard work and research attributed to Frank Ruse, Sue Beazley & Marg Osborne. They were a great achievement and we anticipate a greater interest from the school and the students in the future. There are some pictures of these two tours inside.

This issue also contains a wonderful family story from Doreen James. Doreen has

### Index:

President's Report	1
CPC Tours	2
Research Article	4
Our Latest Book	7
Letters to Editor	8
Name Register	8
Directory	8

### Current Committee :

- President: Rosemary Reddick
- Vice President: Margaret Osborne
- Secretary: Frank Ruse
- Treasurer: Julie Johnston
- Ordinary Committee Members: Ric Norman, Sue Beazley, Steven Johnson

### Contact details:

Friends of Cheltenham  
Regional Cemeteries  
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(Rosemary)



been researching her father's family and agreed to write an article about her Uncle Alex Seamons, who was an intriguing and enigmatic fellow. Alex is buried at Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery. We sincerely thank Doreen for sharing her personal family story with us.

During the year I also dedicated some time to a group called The War Graves Working Group, who are a subcommittee of the Heritage Committee of the RSL Vic. Their aim is to identify and research WW1 service men & women buried at Cheltenham and Brighton cemeteries, in an effort to ensure they are recognised with a war grave/plaque. It is hoped that we can expand to other cemeteries at a later date. Having been part of this group for just over a year now, has realised some success for the Cheltenham & Brighton Cemeteries. It has enabled me to assist in the submissions for over 15 WW1 veterans at Cheltenham Pioneer & Cheltenham Memorial Park Cemeteries. We have been successful for 7 of those men, achieving plaques or full graves, as recognition of their war service. However, sadly, others did not meet the criteria set by the Dept of Vets Affairs. This has prompted the group to begin raising funds, in an effort to place plaques on the graves of all service men & women buried at these cemeteries. If you would like to contribute to this fund, please contact me at [info@focrc.org](mailto:info@focrc.org)

As the year rapidly races to a close and a new one is about to begin, all of the Committee of The Friends wishes you and your family a safe, happy and healthy festive season with a relaxing start to the New Year.

I thank you all for your continued support for The Friends of Cheltenham Group and I look forward to hearing from you in the New Year.

*Rosemary Reddick*

## WALKS AROUND CHELTENHAM PIONEER CEMETERY 2015

*The Friends of Cheltenham Regional Cemeteries has reintroduced guided tours/walks. So far there have been two successful walks with all of the hard work and research attributed to Frank Ruse, Sue Beazley & Marg Osborne.*

### Cheltenham Primary School Tour – October 2015

Sue & Marg spent a whole day at the cemetery in October, conducting a history tour for a great group of students from Cheltenham Primary School. Over 100 children walked around the Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery enthralled by the stories they heard about people of interest buried there, including the first Headmaster of



their school – Walter Meeres. Sue & Marg are both descendants of early Pioneering families to the area, and so, have a vast amount of knowledge about Cheltenham and many of the earliest European families to the area. The students and teacher enjoyed the day, making it a great success and we anticipate a greater interest from Cheltenham Primary School and other local schools in the future.



## Hidden Gems Tour/Walk 1<sup>st</sup> Nov

Frank Ruse, Sue Beazley & Marg Osborne conducted a walk around parts of the Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery which highlighted some of the interesting people buried at the cemetery. The weather was not the best, however the rain did manage to hold off until after the walk was over. It was very well attended with many requesting details for further



*Taking refuge under the porch of the gate house,*

walks. Frank did an outstanding job as tour leader, with Sue Beazley assisting with the session at times. Marg was the quiet achiever in the background, making sure it all went smoothly. Their efforts and hard work is appreciated and valued by all of our members.



*Having a short break, before moving on.*

## Membership Subscription

Membership is open to anyone from around the world with an interest in the Cheltenham Cemeteries, Melbourne Australia. For just \$A15.00 per annum\*, members receive a range of benefits. We also welcome organisations. Please download a membership application form, complete & return to PO Box 2958, Cheltenham Vic 3192 or email to [info@focrc.org](mailto:info@focrc.org). Payment details are available from the website [www.focrc.org](http://www.focrc.org).

\* Plus \$A10.00 joining fee for new members.

## Tours/Walks

Proposed tours/walks dates & themes, at Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery

**2:00 pm Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> March 2016**  
**Ladies of the Cemetery**

\$12 for non-members, \$10 for members  
Refreshments provided. Main tour leader – Sue Beazley

**May 2016—(Law Week)**  
**Convicts &/or Villains**  
Other details to be announced

**October 2016—Children's Week**  
Other details to be announced

**November 2016**  
**Military**  
Remembrance Day. Other details to be announced

For insurance purposes, bookings are essential. To book your place, e-mail [info@focrc.org](mailto:info@focrc.org) or use the Tour Booking Form on our website, [www.focrc.org/tours](http://www.focrc.org/tours).

## Upcoming Tours at Affiliated Cemeteries

### St.Kilda Cemetery

**January 17<sup>th</sup> – Sunday at 2.30pm,**  
Commemoration Service for Albert Jacka VC, MC & Service Bar

**February 28<sup>th</sup> – Sunday at 2pm,**  
Artists Buried at St.Kilda, includes Alfred Felton (of Felton Bequests)

For further details please contact [www.foskc.org](http://www.foskc.org)

### Brighton General Cemetery

**February 21<sup>st</sup> – Sunday at 2pm,**  
Plants and People.

For further details please contact  
[www.brightoncemetorians.org](http://www.brightoncemetorians.org)

Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery, Cheltenham Memorial Park Cemetery, Brighton General Cemetery, St.Kilda Cemetery, Dandenong Community Cemetery, Melbourne General Cemetery, Springvale Botanical Cemetery & Bunurong Memorial Park are all part of the Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust.

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### ALEXANDER SEAMONS

#### aka DOC KARL STENNING aka CARL STENNING

*Written by Doreen James (nee Seamons)  
niece of Alexander James Seamons.*

In 1909, Alexander James was born to Mary Jane (Milne) and William Seamons. He was 6th in the family of 2 girls and 6 boys. The family lived on the edge of the Wombat Forest, near the Deep Creek at Kooroocheang, which is approximately 13 kilometres north of Smeaton, in the central goldfields area of Victoria. Alexander's grandparents, William Seamons and his wife Mary Hedges, had come to Deep Creek after arriving from England in 1848. They were the first European land owners in the area, purchasing up to 100 acres from the Government and clearing the land for a dairy farm. William and Mary were true pioneers, as they turned forested land into viable pasture for cattle without the assistance of modern day machinery. It must have been back breaking work.

In those days the Cobb and Co coach travelled close to the family home after crossing the ford in the creek. The route went south to Eganstown, and north to Yandoit. The Seamons family, along with other settlers, would have taken advantage of these coach tracks for their horses and horse drawn vehicles. Even after the coaches stopped operating, around 1920, there was continual use of these tracks.

Life changed for the Seamons family when Alex' mother, Mary Jane had a tooth extraction and cancer developed in her jaw. She was determined not to die and sought help from several doctors in Melbourne, but unfortunately

she succumbed to the cancer in 1918 at the age of 42. Mary Jane was interred in an unmarked grave at Coburg Cemetery, but soon the present-day family hope to erect some form of recognition, for Mary, at her gravesite. At the time of her death, Mary's youngest son Stanley was 5, Robert was 7, Alexander was 8, and my father Leslie was 11. The older family members were George 14, Caroline 17, Sarah 18 and William 20.

William, Alex' father, who was 44 at this time, worked in a gold mine called 'Spa' in the nearby forest and also did various jobs in the local area. After Mary Jane's death, William's sister Mary Ann moved down from NSW to care for the family and was ably assisted by his daughter Sarah. My father Leslie, started cooking for the family when he was young, which may help explain why he was such a good cook. More tragedy was to impact on the family when Stanley died in 1929 at the age of 17 from a tetanus infection and Caroline died in 1943 when she was 42, due to a heart condition. So, the family had their share of heartache, as did many families in those days, as they tried to eke out a living.

The boys were strong and knew how to use their fists when there was a need. Alex learned to wrestle in Ballarat, and he did exhibition wrestling with a local man called Henry who was a great deal taller than Alex. Henry had trouble holding onto Alex because he was 'much shorter and

round.’ They performed exhibition wrestling in the Newstead Hall and in other venues, as far as Ballarat. People paid to watch them and they were very popular in their time. Robert was also a very good boxer, and he boxed in exhibition matches at the same venue. Leslie also did exhibition wrestling and some boxing.

Alex worked around the area doing odd jobs, as did Leslie and their father William. Leslie and William senior went to Melbourne around 1930 to assist in the laying of tram tracks to St Kilda, living in a boarding house in Prahran. Leslie had an Indian motor bike with a side car. We wonder if our mother ever travelled in the side car. Alex was also in Melbourne at this time.

The West Melbourne Stadium (now called Festival Hall) had been built in 1915 for boxing and pro-wrestling, so Alex often wrestled there. The Stadium was known locally as ‘The House of Stoush.’ By now Alex had learned about the pressure points in the body and was using them to his advantage during wrestling.

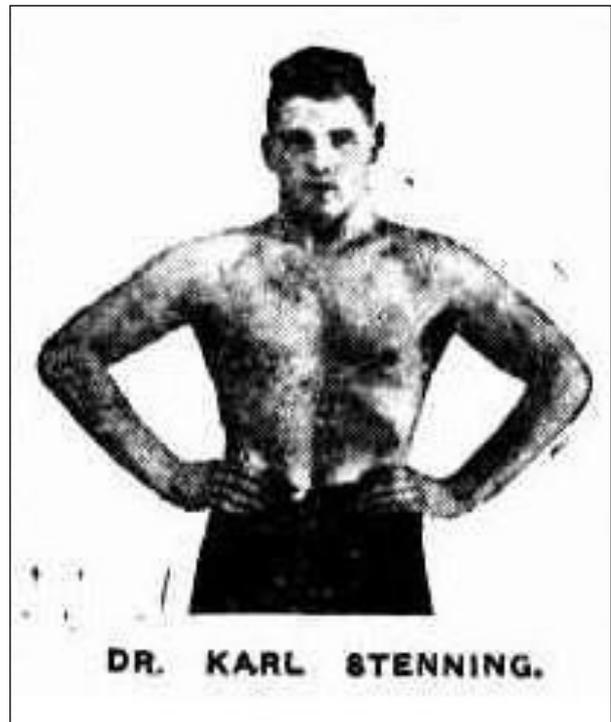


In 1929 Alex married Ann Curtis and they had their portrait taken at The Sears Studio in Melbourne. Ann was the daughter of James Curtis, a founding father of the Celtic Graves Society.

Nephews and nieces of Alex only knew of his wife to be Gwen, rather than Ann; but cannot remember her. They knew their daughter as Buddy, and not Marie, which was her given name. Some time after their marriage, Alex went to Queensland to wrestle and was popular in the towns of Rockhampton and Brisbane. It seems he was also partial to gambling, as he gambled in Queensland.

Alex took on the name of Karl Stenning when he became a professional wrestler. In the Brisbane newspaper, ‘The Telegraph’ page 10 on Monday, 28 March, 1932, Alex was being referred to as Doc Karl Stenning ‘the wrestling doctor’ and expert ‘nerve specialist’, and ‘the noted South African heavy weight wrestler.’

The image below accompanied the article about Doctor Karl Stenning.



This image is of Karl in a wrestling pose, in Sidney Riley Studios in Brisbane in 1934. This



photo was taken just prior to Karl leaving for New Zealand. The writing to the left appears to read. “KARL STENNING” ALEX SEAMONS AGED 25

At this time Karl seems to have become his permanent name. Possibly soon after this photo was taken, Karl left for New Zealand. His daughter was only 4 years of age. Many reasons have been given for Karl moving to New Zealand to wrestle, money was possibly one reason, but none of them can be satisfactorily verified.

Another image of Karl wrestling in New Zealand. The writing on the photo reads, *'With love to Butsey.'* Aug 1934.

Mrs. Butts, according to Alex's sister Sarah, was their father's housekeeper at some time.



When Karl returned to Australia, he set up 'Stenning Gym' in La Trobe Street in the city of Melbourne. He operated the business for several years, teaching wrestling there. Karl was an excellent wrestler and entertainer. He used a technique to conquer his opponents that involved 'bone and joint leverages and nerve pressures.' This caused his opponent to fall due to the pain, sometimes even being temporarily disabled. This technique was obviously new at that time, but is no longer legal in wrestling.

'Stenning had a reputation for using his brain more than his brawn,' as was quoted in the papers of the day, but nevertheless he was very strong as were at least two of his brothers, Leslie and Robert.

In 1939, when my brother Brian was 6, he remembers Uncle Alex, his wife and daughter coming to my parent's home in Kooroocheang, Victoria. Then another tragedy hit the family when Alex and Gwen's (Ann) daughter Buddy (Marie) died the following year in 1940. Buddy was only 10 and died due to loss of blood after a tonsillectomy. Gwen was devastated at the loss of her daughter and the marriage apparently ended. Brian never saw Uncle Alex again.

My cousins Beth and Jim lived in Deep Creek on the Seamons property when they were young. One of

Beth's earliest memories of Alex was when he arrived by light aircraft wearing a leather coat and a flying helmet. How extraordinary and out of place he must have appeared to a young girl?

Both Alex and George lost contact with their family, even though there is no mention of any family disharmony. George seemed to have been regarded as the 'black sheep of the family' but I am unaware of the reason. George died in 1977 at the age of 74 and is in an unmarked grave in Bulla. His wife, Kathleen Seamons (nee Gilbert) is buried in Geelong.

Alex, on the other hand, visited his father William (my Grandpop) when it suited him

and never left empty handed. William possibly had money as he sold the Seamons property that his parents had purchased all those years ago, to a local farmer with adjoining land.

William spent his last years with family members and was always welcome. He was a gentle soul, loved by all. He resided with Leslie's family in Kooroocheang for 2 or more years, until he became ill which was unusual for him. His other sons, Bill and Bob were always present in his life. William also lived with Sarah and her family in Ballarat and his personal trunk of memorabilia, along with the Seamons Bible containing family history, were at her home. When William passed away in 1967 at the grand age of 90, Alex took the trunk and the Bible from Sarah's house. *Why would Alex want family memorabilia and the Seamons Bible when he had turned his back on his family?*

For a number of years, Alex was a great advocate for the introduction of poker machines into Victoria. He was the President of the Licensed Club of Victoria at least from 1981 to 1983.

His wife, Ann (Gwen) died in 1972 and was buried with her daughter.

According to records, 1972 was a year of change for Alex. Ann died, he changed his name from Karl

Stenning to Carl Stenning, and he moved to Red Hill on the Mornington Peninsula, becoming an orchardist. He also began a relationship with Meg Cross. And because he was close to Frankston, Alex could pursue his love of gambling and poker machines.

Alex' younger brother Robert (Bob) had lived on the Mornington Peninsula for many years. Bob and his wife Nora moved to Rosebud and operated a 'corner' store. One day Bob saw Alex walking by, and being the kind hearted man he was, attempted to connect with Alex. Sadly, Alex showed no real interest in any relationship.

When Bob learned of Alex' hospitalization prior to his death he visited him. However, Alex did not extend an invitation to Bob to attend his funeral. Obviously the existence of a brother did not fit in with Alex' plans. He was determined to maintain his façade literally to his grave. Bob informed my father Leslie, of Alex' death in 1985 aged 76. My father died 2 years later in 1987 at the age of 81.

Bob told me about Alex' partner Meg Cross. In 1991, I wrote to her referring to Carl as Uncle Alex. In her reply, she said it took her a while to realize I was speaking of her partner of 20 years. To her, he was Carl (spelt with a C) and she knew nothing of the

Seamons family or of Ann and Marie until he was close to death. She told me Carl was buried with his wife and child in Cheltenham cemetery, and she was obeying Carl's request not to give details of his burial site. We can only speculate about the reason why Alexander never told his partner Meg about his life before he met her, or why he chose to reject his past and his family.



*Alexander Seamons' grave at Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery, Victoria.*

A plaque with the name SEAMONS is at the foot of the grave, but Ann and Marie only are acknowledged on the headstone.

*Written by Doreen James, using various sources for information. Many thanks to those people who provided information or helped in some other way. My apologies for any omissions or inaccuracies.*

*16<sup>th</sup> September, 2015 Doreen James dj*

## Our latest book

### ***The Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery: Where History Rests***

After 150 years serving the community, the Pioneer Cemetery is worth remembering... Written by Travis M. Sellers (2007-14), *The Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery: Where History Rests* is the fifth book in the *Remembering Them* series published by the Friends of Cheltenham and Regional Cemeteries Inc. With an index of over 800 names. It is a rich source covering not only the history of the Pioneer Cemetery, but snippets of local history featuring persons buried at the cemetery. The publication contains a number of appendices including a summary of the trustee minutes (1863-1932).

**[Download the index and see if your ancestor is included!](#) [PDF-177KB]**

**Limited print run of just 105 copies, each book is individually numbered and signed by the author. Paperback.**

\$40.00 incl. postage and handling (\$36.00 for financial members)

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## **NAME CONNECTION REGISTRY:**

If you are keen to discover if another financial member of The Friends group may be researching, or interested in your ancestor, why don't you send us in the name of your ancestor and their living years' range. Just email us at: [info@focrc.org](mailto:info@focrc.org)

With all responses, a mutually arranged and agreed exchange of contact details will occur. All personal details are confidential. Example:

NAME:

***Knight, Annie Black*** [c1850 – c1922]

(Father - Thomas Knight, Mother - Elise)

***Fairlam, William Percy*** [1860 – 1947]

***Stayner, George*** [1844 – 1922]

Dorset UK, Cheltenham Vic.

***Bally, Hannah*** [1822 – 1904]

Suffolk UK, Cheltenham Vic.

## **Letters or Emails to the Editor**

Hello Rosemary,

I thank you for your very prompt reply to my enquiry, and will now pursue your recommendations.

You have been most helpful!

Regards,

Geoffrey Hayes

Dear Rosemary

I can't thank you enough for this! Thank you.

My mum is going to be happy to finally know where her parents are buried.

Cherie

## **Annual General Meeting**

Recently the Committee held The Friends AGM. The meeting was held at the Summer House within the Cheltenham Pioneer Cemetery grounds and we were thankful that it was a reasonable day, weather wise.



Frank Ruse – Secretary

Rosemary Reddick – President



Sue Beazley - Committee member

Julie Johnston - Treasurer



Marg Osborne – Vice President

Steven Johnson – Committee member

Ric Norman- Committee member

### **Directory**

#### **Current Sponsors:**

- Astral Monuments,  
ph: 1300 729 432
- Janet Tacken – Civil Celebrant.  
[www.jennyfuneralcelebrant.com.au](http://www.jennyfuneralcelebrant.com.au)  
ph: 0430 181 820
- Peaberry's Café,  
Charman Rd, Cheltenham.

#### **Affiliated Associations:**

- Brighton Cemeterians
- St. Kilda Friends Group
- Sandringham & District Historical Society
- Dingley Village Historical Society
- Moorabbin Historical Society
- Bayside Historical Group
- South Eastern Historical Group
- War Graves Working Group
- Southern Metropolitan Cemetery Trust (SMCT)