

Article entitled "Early Burial Place - Borough Market Site" from the *Newcastle Morning Herald & Miners Advocate*, 13th November 1915 p.3
Transcribed by Gianni Di Gravio May 2004

EARLY BURIAL PLACE.

BOROUGH MARKET SITE.

The discovery of human bones by the workmen engaged on the excavations for the erection of Mrs. Spencer's picture theatre on the site of the old Borough Markets in Hunter-street, Newcastle, has naturally raised some curiosity respecting the early history of the area.

With a view to ascertaining as accurately as possible whether the site was originally a cemetery a representative of the "Newcastle Morning Herald" yesterday interviewed several old residents of Newcastle upon the subject. The fact that human remains, properly interred in a coffin, and laid out according to the orthodox rites of Christian burial, suggested the possibility that the area was at a very early period portion of the old Christ Church burial ground in which the Newcastle Cathedral now stands. This supposition was, however, completely negated by the persons spoken to, who in each instance were quite clear, from their talks with Newcastle's pioneer settlers, that while it was probably used as a burying place by the aborigines, it was never at any time a recognised cemetery of the early settlers of the district.

Mr. Colin Christie, a former Mayor of the city, and who has been identified with its movements since 1849, when he settled in Newcastle, said that to his own recollections, and from what he had learned from the very early settlers the site of the old markets was never a part of the cathedral cemetery. The old Christ Church was built in the year 1817, and it was probable that, prior to that period, the bodies which had been recently resurrected had been buried upon the spot, as one unused and convenient, by the aborigines and by some of the very early settlers. With regard to the discovery on Wednesday of the remains of what was presumably a white man, he was inclined to the opinion that it was that of a soldier in service in the early period when the white population was chiefly attached to the Imperial service. The site where the Newcastle School of Arts now stands was then a blacks' camp, and it was also the location of Newcastle's original pound. Speaking of 1849, Mr. Christie said that the fence was then standing, though the place was not in use as a pound. He was aware that blacks had been buried on the spot where the Borough Markets were built many years later, but he had never heard of it having been used as a burying ground for white people. The presumption was, however, that it had been so used in the pioneer days prior to the year 1817, when Christ Church was erected, for as far as he was aware—and believed—there was no area previously set apart as a cemetery. The limit of the cathedral grounds was distinctly remembered by Mr. Christie as being on the north at the King-street border, and it never extended beyond that. He was quite certain that it never took in the area in which the human remains were recently found. He could not remember when the stone retaining wall was built, which still exists, and separates the old cemetery from

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ists, and separates the old cemetery from King-street. The indent in the wall was made for the purpose of erecting a stair-way communicating with the pathway running through the church yard. Newcastle was established in 1803, and it was quite probable that the remains of the white man was one of the first settlers—soldier or civilian—engaged in the pioneer work of the city. Mr. Christie, who has many books, cuttings, and references of the very early history of the Newcastle district, searched diligently, but could not find any data that bore upon the subject, or would ~~furnish any reasonable grounds for its~~ elucidation.

Mr. Peter Streit, of Islington, who came to Newcastle in 1857, and has remained here ever since, bore out Mr. Christie's views in a general way. He said that he had frequently been told by old people of the time that they buried their dead in any place which appeared most suitable, and that, sometimes, was in their gardens. No such thing had happened during his own time, but old settlers had vouched for the practice, and ~~said that it was a convenient mode of burial, and saved time and expense.~~ They were a rough, hardy class, and not given to the finer sentiments of to-day, but they conducted their burials decently and honourably, and enclosed their dead in coffins, strongly though roughly made, and these were invariably given a draping of black cloth. This was prior to the cemeteries of the Anglican Church on the hill, or the other cemeteries at Hunter-street West. Mr. Streit avowed that the site of the Newcastle School of Arts was a burying ground for the blacks, but he could not say whether the old market site was similarly used, although it was quite probable, especially as bodies had been found there. Mr. Streit said that when he arrived in 1857 the West End Cemetery had just been opened. He remembered at the time old pioneers of thirty and forty years living in the place who referred to the new cemeteries in such a phrase as "What a fuss people make of burying nowadays. Why we used to nail a box together, and put them in the ground."

Mrs. J. S. Rodgers was interestingly reminiscent when spoken to on the subject. Mrs. Rodgers was born in Newcastle 72 years ago, on the spot where Messrs. Scotts, Ltd.'s buildings now stand at the corner of Hunter and Perkin streets. The site was then occupied by her parents, the late Mr. and Mrs. Howden. Mrs. Howden conducted a general store, and Mr. Howden had his engineering and blacksmith's shop at the rear. Mrs. Rodgers' recollections go back well over 60 years, when as a child she played on the harbour frontage and the grass ~~where~~ where now stand many of the city's most important buildings. She had a distinct recollection of Newcastle's earliest settlers, and had often spoken to them of their early history. Hunter-street was

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their early history. Hunter-street was not then formed, and frequently she saw carts sink up to their axles in sand when bringing coal from Donaldson's pits, which were situated at the tunnel beyond Merewether. "Hunter-street," said Mrs. Rodgers, "was really a high bank, much after the Carrington-road when the bridge existed; but nothing near so good. As a road it could not be compared with the old Carrington thoroughfare. The public pound stood where Messrs. D. Cohen and Company's big warehouse now stands, and a paddock existed, upon the present location of the Newcastle School of Arts. The tide came up to that point, and a sandy beach ran along the harbour front to the Queen's Wharf, which was a squared mound made of ballast. The area upon which the new picture theatre is being built in Hunter-street was an unfenced paddock." Mrs. Rodgers' remembrance of the area was that it was a big space running back for a considerable distance. In those days there were many blacks, and they numbered nearly, or quite, as many as the white population. She always understood that the aborigines were buried in the paddocks in the vicinity of Hunter-street, but they were very reticent as to the actual places where they buried their dead. Mrs. Rodgers had no recollection of any white person having been buried in the paddocks, and had never heard of any such interments. She remembered the area of the Church of England cemetery, which prior to the erection of the stone retaining wall was fenced off. The cemetery was always confined to its present boundaries, and had not extended to the site of the old market buildings. Her recollections of the grounds was still vivid, for she had frequently been on the grounds as a child. Near one end of the ground stood the residence of Mr. Simon Kemp, and at the other end was erected Mr. Beresford Hudson's house. It was quite possible that in the very early days, prior to the existence of any actual cemetery grounds, that white people had been buried in the paddocks, where the aborigines had found their last resting place. The grant of the market site, which embraced two acres, was made by the Government to the Newcastle Council in 1868, and quite recently the history of the buildings afterwards erected was published in these columns.

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