

A Word from The President

As winter settled in, our events and tours quietened down a bit. However, it seems that everyone at home was busier than ever with researching family histories and looking for where their ancestors are buried. I can't believe how many requests we have received! Please keep them coming.

We were thrilled to be part of Open House Melbourne in July. We were the only cemetery featured among 170 locations in the 2024 OHM Program. Despite the rain and cold, it was a great success. You can read about it in this newsletter.

We are busy planning our future tour schedule and gathering stories to share with you. Stay well, and we look forward to seeing you all again soon. In the meantime, follow us on Facebook, visit our website, or become a FoCC member to receive email updates on all the latest happenings!

Kelly Morgan

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Open House Melbourne: A Walk Through Time

This July, the Friends of Coburg Cemetery invited visitors to step back in time as part of the 2024 Open House Melbourne programme. Over two days, dozens of curious participants joined us for six engaging tours, where history, architecture, and stories from Melbourne's past came to life.

While cemeteries might not be the first place people think of during Open House Melbourne, Coburg Cemetery's monuments and memorials stand as silent witnesses to the city's rich architectural and cultural heritage. Our tours aligned perfectly with the event's aim to encourage people to rediscover Melbourne, explore new places, and reconnect with old favourites.

Though the tours were shorter than our usual two-hour walks, we made sure to introduce fresh stories alongside some of our well-loved narratives. Recent research allowed us to share new discoveries, such as the fascinating life of "Zinga Lee" the fortune teller, and Felix Rolland, a pioneering figure, publican and Mayor whose contributions helped shape the local area. Visitors were surprised to find so much history hidden in this corner of the northern suburbs.

Many had never been to Coburg Cemetery before and were amazed by the depth of history held within its grounds. One participant remarked, "I've lived in



Melbourne all my life but never knew how much history was hidden in this cemetery!"

Coburg Cemetery's unique blend of historical stories and impressive memorials made it a natural fit for Open House Melbourne, demonstrating that even places dedicated to rest have significant cultural and architectural importance.

Inspired by what you've read? Join us for our next walking tour, and uncover more hidden stories of Melbourne's past. There's always more to discover within the gates of Coburg Cemetery.

Runaway Train to Heaven

Grave 248 in section Methodist-A is an unassuming plot large enough to fit two graves but marked with just the one broken-off tombstone: dedicated to Alice May, dearly loved daughter of Henry and Alice Richards, who passed away on December 9, 1902, and found her resting place under the gum trees at only 19 years old. A marble urn engraved with 'Father' sits beside the tombstone collecting drops in the rain, clearly a later addition and the only indication that Henry Richards rests here alongside his daughter. But could you imagine the story of how Alice ended up here in her youthful prime starts with a runaway train?

Henry Richards was a former stationmaster at Coburg Station and a beloved community figurehead, whose 10-year long outpost came to a dramatic halt with an incident that occurred on November 3, 1902. A shunting blunder caused two carriages from an afternoon train to run away from Coburg, rolling all the way through Brunswick and down the line into North Melbourne where it crashed into two goods trucks, destroying several level-crossing gates in the process. While the Victorian Railways' official inquiry found more fault with the porter who carried out the shunt, they still fined and suspended Henry and were determined to transfer him elsewhere for his apparent oversight of the misplaced catch points.

Except the Coburg public were not at all happy with this decision! While Henry was serving out his suspension, Councillors Melville and Anstey at the then Shire of Coburg led a deputation to the Minister of Railways himself, Thomas Bent, armed with a petition signed by over 600 residents. Henry was clearly a trustworthy and popular fellow, as stationmasters tended to be. The community maintained the runaway train was just a 'momentary accident' in his otherwise courteous and faithful service, and the suspension and fine was punishment enough.

The pressure was clearly strong enough for Bent and the department to hold on transferring Henry for the time being, but just 7 months later his notice to leave Coburg came anyway, and this time nobody could say no. He was farewelled at the Shire with a smoke night, with many gracious toasts and speeches from the Council's cream of the crop, and he called his time at Coburg as 'among the most pleasant days of his life'. His transfer, along with his family, would be to Clunes, out in the far former goldfields on the desolate Mildura line.

The change in social climate must have affected the Richards family deeply. Alice, their eldest daughter, was said to have been 'ailing ever since she left Coburg' and passed away in Clunes after just 3 months of their move. Her love for our little town must've been strong enough for her family to bring her hearse all the way back to Coburg Cemetery where her funeral took place on December 12, 1903. During her formative years she went to Coburg Wesleyan Sunday School, and so members of the Wesleyan Choir came down to the cemetery for her final send off.



The epitaph on Alice's grave reads "Nothing in my hand I bring / Simply to Thy cross I cling."

Once Henry had retired from the railways in 1909, the family promptly moved back to Coburg, and on September 3, 1919 at the age of 62, Henry joined his daughter in Grave 248 and the station in the great beyond.

This fascinating little story was a perfect intersection of my work as a railway history researcher and FoCC member, and I have no doubt there are others like it lurking amid the pines. You never know when the next one will jump out at you!

By Riya Daniel, FoCC member

Join FOCC and get involved!

We are a small group with some big ideas! If you'd like to get more involved in FoCC activities we are always looking for members and people who can research, write stories, take photos, present on tours, hunt up funding sources and promote FoCC activities. Contact us to find out more: focc.group@gmail.com

From Sunshine to Coburg – by deadly rail

We briefly leave Coburg – but not for too long – to revisit yet another railway mishap, just a few years later in 1908. It was 10:50 pm on Easter Monday, when a train packed with holidaymakers returning to Melbourne from Ballarat was struck by another train coming from Bendigo, near the junction at Sunshine. Both trains were running late and were travelling at reasonable speeds in an attempt to make up time.

The impact of the collision demolished the guard's van and the rear four carriages, and the gas used to light lamps in the old trains caught on fire. The pitch darkness impeded rescue efforts, with only lamp light and light from the fire available. It was not until 1:00 am that a relief train arrived with doctors, nurses, and an ambulance corp.

44 people were killed and another 400+ injured, and to this day the Sunshine Rail Disaster is the worst recorded railway accident in Victoria, the second-worst in Australia. All lives lost occurred on the Ballarat train. 4 of the deceased are buried in Coburg Cemetery: Rupert Watson, 15-year-old Coburg boy; Maggie and Annie Tucker, mother and daughter of Dandenong (who are also part of the cemetery's self guided heritage walk); and Charles Williamson, 37, from Moonee Ponds.

Charles Frederick Williamson (1870–1908)

Charles was born in June 1870 in Newstead, Victoria, and spent most of his life there before moving to Melbourne. He married a Newstead local, Mary Chalmers, in 1897 and welcomed their only child Vera there in 1900. The Williamson family resided in Moonee Ponds where Charles was the manager of a produce store just as he had been in Newstead. But they would remain in Melbourne for less than 2 years.



C. F. Williams.
(Richards and Co., photo.)

The Williamson family travelled to Ballarat to spend the Easter holidays of 1908 with Mr Hunichen and family. Originally the Williamsons intended to return to Melbourne together but after a little persuasion by the Hunichens, Mary and Vera stayed behind in Ballarat, and Charles would return as he had business to tend to the next day. Little did they know that would be the last time they said goodbye to him.

There was some confusion of his identity in newspaper reports as he was reported dead twice under different names: Frederick Williamson of North Brighton and Charles F Williams of Elizabeth Street, Moonee Ponds.

Charles was only 37 at the time of his death. You will find Charles and Mary Williamson buried in the Presbyterian P, Grave 524 (surrounded by the Chalmers family).



Charles' and Mary's
gravestone in the
Presbyterian P section
of Coburg Cemetery

**DO YOU NEED HELP
LOCATING A GRAVE IN
COBURG CEMETERY?**

**NO NEED TO WORRY,
FRIENDS OF COBURG CEMETERY
CAN HELP YOU!**

**MAYBE YOU KNOW SOMEONE BURIED IN
COBURG CEMETERY BUT CAN'T MAKE IT TO SEE
THEIR GRAVE IN PERSON OR
YOU NEED HELP FINDING AN EXACT LOCATION.**

To get **FREE** assistance from one of our fantastic grave
searchers/researchers you can

Email us

focc.group@gmail.com

OR

Use the online contact form

<https://friendsofcoburgcemetery.com/grave-search>

DIY: A Grave Fixer-Upper



Here's an example of a quick, easy and inexpensive way to smarted up a simple, unmarked grave. A few old bricks, a couple of bags of pebbles and what was a patch of grass and weeds is now a clearly defined grave, showing that even though long-gone, these people mattered.

There is no one alive who remembers Irena Ivey (Jamieson) Bennett. She died in 1930 at only 37, leaving 4 young children with her husband, Daniel Bennett, living in South Melbourne. He later remarried and the children went on to have their own families.

Shared with her husband's parents, Ivey's grave is no longer unmarked, unkempt and forgotten. Her ancestors didn't know her but now her grandchildren know where she lies, who she was and can one day show her grave to their own children.



ANZAC Tour review

This ANZAC Day, Friends of Coburg Cemetery came together to honour the brave men and women who served our country with a special guided tour. Despite the chilly afternoon, our group was fortunate that the rain held off until the very end, allowing us to visit and pay tribute at the graves of eight individuals who served Australia during the First World War.

The tour began with a moment of acknowledgement and the solemn reading of the Ode of Remembrance. We then proceeded to the graves of:

- The Mahlstedt Family
- Richard Teasdale
- Henry Bowden
- May Dickson
- Lt. Richard Courtney
- Charles Dedman
- Aperahama Abraham
- Elizabeth Regan

At each site, we laid sprigs of rosemary and hand-knitted poppies as symbols of remembrance and respect. Thank you again to Pearl.

Each of these individuals has a unique story of courage and dedication, and their experiences serve as a

poignant reminder of how global events like war can deeply affect local communities. The stories we shared highlighted not only the personal sacrifices of these servicemen and women but also the broader impact on their families and the various communities they represented.

The tour also sparked meaningful conversations about the recognition of servicemen and women, both historically and in the present day. We were fortunate to have our knowledgeable member, Steve P, on hand to answer many of the questions that arose, enriching the experience for all who attended.

As we gathered around the last grave, the first drops of rain began to fall, as if nature itself was offering its own tribute to the fallen. The ANZAC Day tour was a moving and reflective experience, reminding us all of the importance of remembering and honouring those who served. *Let us not forget.*



Felix Rolland, a man of many skills

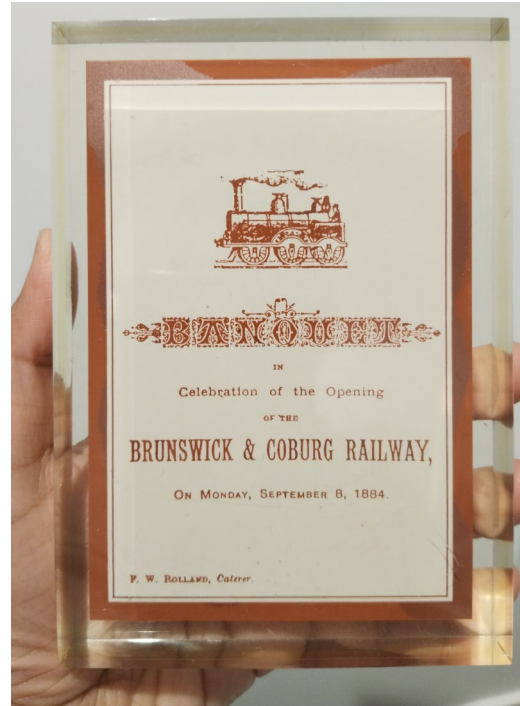
The Steward, The Publican, The Mayor, and the Coburg Cemetery Trustee: these are the titles Felix Rolland held throughout his remarkable life.

Born around 1839 in Wales, Felix arrived in Australia in the mid-1860s with his wife Anne. They first settled in Williamstown, where he became the licensee of the Pier Hotel – the first of many in his career as a master publican.

Though young, Felix quickly became a beloved and well-travelled character, affectionately known as ‘Rolly’. He was famous for outsmarting authorities during the restrictive Sunday trading laws, thanks to his secret weapon: a parrot perched in an elm tree. The bird would squawk, “Get the glasses away, here comes Little Harvey”, alerting Felix to the presence of police officers, and by the time they arrived, all signs of trading had disappeared. Another famous line? “The police are coming! The police, the police are coming!”

Felix went on to manage several hotels, including Sparrow’s Hotel at St Kilda Junction, the All England Eleven Hotel in Port Melbourne, and the South Yarra Club Hotel on Toorak Road. His life was filled with entertaining stories – and no doubt plenty more collected over the bar – robberies, an assault on a gas account collector, and objections from a church across the road to an ‘ungodly’ man running a nearby pub.

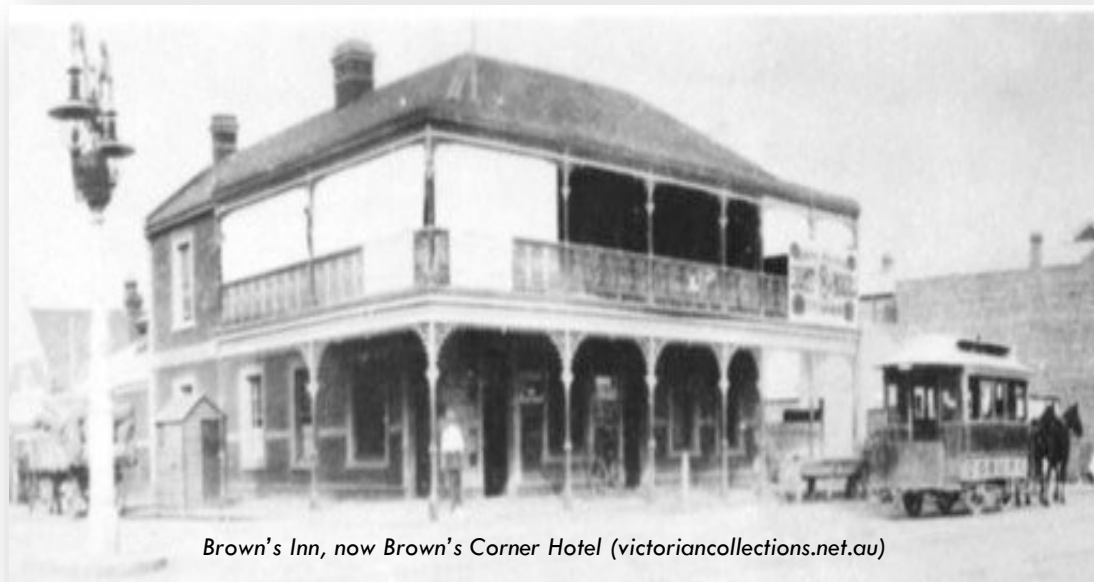
In the early 1880s Felix, his second wife Faithful, and their only child Adelaide began their 20-year chapter as Coburg locals. He served as the licensee of the Pentridge Hotel, later known as the Corner Inn, now Browns Corner Hotel. In 1884, he catered the Coburg Shire Hall



*Railway line opening memento provided to Coburg City Council with Felix Rolland listed as caterer.
Photo by Riya Daniel/Coburg Historical Society.*

ceremony for the opening of the Brunswick and Coburg Railway (today’s Upfield line) – a most generous banquet including all the fashionable desserts of the time and 14 different selections of meat!

Felix passed away on January 22, 1922 at his residence ‘Touraine’ in Prahran, at the age of 83. He was laid to rest alongside Adelaide (d. 1891) and later his beloved Faithful, who joined them in 1925.



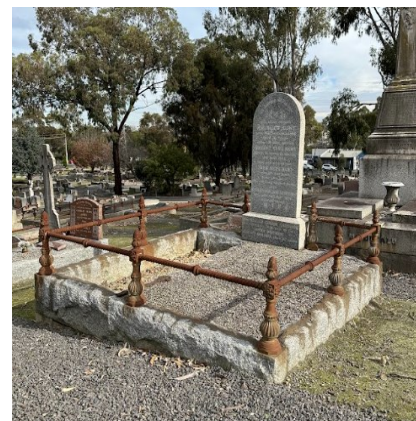
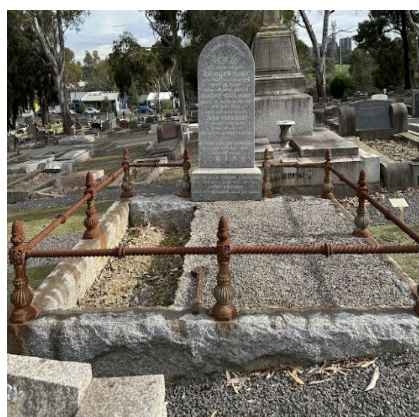
Brown’s Inn, now Brown’s Corner Hotel (victoriancollections.net.au)

Then and Now: A Changing Landscape

The landscape of Coburg has changed dramatically over the years. What was once a patchwork of fields and farms has transformed into a bustling inner suburb, with roads, apartments, and new developments springing up all around. In the photos that follow, you'll see just how much the area has evolved since the days when Bridget Hunt lived here.

Bridget Hunt passed away on November 26, 1915, at the age of 62 and was laid to rest the following day. Hers was the first burial in this grave, and since then, five other members of her family have been buried alongside her.

The historic view of the cemetery faces southwest, with Bell Street visible in the background. A row of cypress pines once lined the fence along Elizabeth Street, though these trees are no longer there. Today, gum trees block the view of Bell Street, offering a striking contrast to the landscape of Bridget's time.



UPCOMING EVENT: Cemeteries Seminar - October 12, 2024

Friends of Coburg Cemetery is excited to participate in the upcoming seminar "Grave Matters: Using Victoria's Cemeteries As A Research Tool," hosted by the Royal Historical Society of Victoria and the Genealogical Society of Victoria. We'll be there alongside the Friends of Brighton and Booroondara Cemetery to discuss the vital role cemeteries and friends groups play in preserving history.

Key Speakers include Dr. Celestina Sagazio (Cemetery Historian), Dr. Cheryl Griffin (Social Historian), and Rod Armstrong (Family History Researcher), along with insights from dedicated members of our friends groups.

- Date: Saturday, 12 October 2024
- Time: 9:00 am (for 9:30 am start)
- Location: Royal Historical Society of Victoria, 239 A'Beckett St, Melbourne
- Cost: \$65 RHSV & GSV Members, \$85 Non-Members

Join us to explore how cemeteries serve as invaluable resources for research and heritage preservation.

Friends of Coburg Cemetery Inc.

President: Kelly Morgan; Treasurer: Julie-Ann Morgan, Committee: Colleen and Gerry Burns, Yvonne Kernan, Jill O'Connor, Julie Stratford

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