Biography

Jeremiah "Jerome" Cahill

aOn the morning of 17 April 1925, Jeremiah "Jerome" Cahill was driving a two-horse dray along Geelong Road, Footscray when one of those new-fangled “motor lorries” crashed into him. He was towing a motorcyclist who was holding onto the back of the cart after his bike had stalled, and the sun had just risen behind them. Later the driver of the motor lorry, Walter Carter of the Carter Bros poultry business at Werribee, claimed the rising sun was in his eyes and he had trouble seeing what was coming.



Jerome and Maud Cahill on their wedding day in 1916

Thrown onto the road and suffering severe head injuries, Jerome was taken to the Alfred Hospital, where he died later that day. He was just 35 years old.

Jerome's widow, Alice "Maud" Cahill, sued for compensation. With two young children, she had lost the family’s main source of income now that Jerome was gone. At the inquest the facts were disputed and blame was pointed in both directions. The driver claimed that not only was the sun in his eyes but Jerome had drifted to the wrong side of the road, so was also at fault. But there were witnesses. Several of them. And they disputed Carter’s story. One witness was the motorcyclist. He told the court he saw the motor lorry steering towards the side of Jerome's vehicle. Another witness said he saw the motor lorry swerve to the right and strike the rear wheel of the cart, throwing Jerome from his seat. A third witness told the court that after the collision Carter admitted, "It is my fault. I will fix up the damages."

The jury found in favour of Maud and her two children, Maureen and Francis, awarding damages of £1,500.

This story came to light through Friends of Coburg Cemetery member Annie Pain-Davis, Jerome's granddaughter. Annie recalled how the accident changed the course of her family's life. Maud was left to raise two young children alone and would outlive her husband by more than sixty years. She later saved enough money to erect a substantial monument over Jerome's grave. Sadly, the monument was vandalised and broken, with only part of it surviving today.

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More than a century after Jerome's death, the story remains an important part of the family's history. Jerome, Maud and their son Francis are buried together at Coburg Cemetery, while members of Maud's family rest nearby. Their graves stand as a reminder of how a single event can alter the course of a family's life for generations.