

Biography



Charles Elias Bowden (1855 – 1926)

Caretaker, Coburg Cemetery

Charles Bowden was born at Longdowns, Cornwall in April 1855. He married Elizabeth Symons on Christmas Eve 1879 and the young couple set off immediately on their honeymoon trip - to Australia.

They settled in Coburg, where their first child was born in 1882. Nine more children followed. Most died in infancy or early childhood. Only one child, a daughter, married.

Charles Bowden was a stonemason and son of a stonemason. At home in Cornwall he lived amongst a community of fellow masons. In Melbourne, he continued his trade until he lost three fingers in an accident. No longer able to work at his trade, he became the caretaker of Coburg Cemetery, a position he held for more than twenty years from the 1890s.

His work life sometimes led him in unexpected and distressing directions, such as on a late Thursday afternoon in early December 1905 when he was part of a group searching for the body of eight-year old Doris Hunter who had drowned in the Merri Creek while playing in an area not far from the cemetery. They dragged the river and it was Bowden who found her body. His youngest child, six year old Montague, had died almost exactly twelve months earlier, so no doubt this intensified his feelings on finding the little girl's body.

During his working lifetime, the Bowden family lived at the Lodge, in the Cemetery grounds, but on retirement they moved to 209 Nicholson Street, just near the junction with Bell Street.

He is remembered today through the 'Charles Bowden Reserve', on the eastern side of Nicholson Street, on land he once owned.

A regular worshipper at Coburg Methodist Church, Charles Bowden died in March 1926 aged 71. He is buried in the Methodist section of the Cemetery with his wife Elizabeth and four of their children. (Methodist P, Grave 591)

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Sources:

Coburg Leader, 15 June 1895

Coburg History Society Newsletter, No. 10, November 1979, p.59

GMCT burial records

1871 English Census

Victorian electoral rolls

Victorian Birth, Death and Marriage Indexes

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