

## Commemoration of a “life of unselfish energy”

In February 2016, 100 years after his death, we celebrated the life of Laurence Cohen, a powerful, respected and loved community leader who worked tirelessly for workers’ rights and the Victorian community.

Kelvin Thompson, Member for Wills, presented at Cohen’s graveside and reminded us all that although mostly now forgotten, Laurie Cohen was a much-admired union official and Labor stalwart of the late 1800s.

A hundred years ago, after speaking at a meeting of striking miners in Broken Hill, Laurie checked in to a hotel in Adelaide and, possibly due to fatigue, fell from the hotel window and died, aged 41. The remarkable monument was carved by his past employer, George Atyeo and erected the year after



his death by his colleagues in the labour movement and the Political Labor Council. Descriptions in newspapers at the time described it as “one of the most striking in the Coburg Cemetery”. The epitaph carved into black granite reads: *“He gave the best within him in the cause of the workers, till an untimely death closed a life of unselfish energy”*.



## Diary Dates:

### 2016 TOUR DATES

- 17 APRIL - THE ANZACS
- 19 JUNE - REMARKABLE WOMEN OF COBURG CEMETERY
- 21 AUGUST - MONUMENTS AND HEADSTONES
- 16 OCTOBER - LAWYERS, GUNS AND MONEY

### AGM

- JULY 17 2016

### MONTHLY SHED DAYS (FOCC MEETINGS)

THIRD SUNDAY OF EVERY MONTH.

- 15 MAY 2016
- 19 JUNE (INCLUDES TOUR)
- 17 JULY
- 21 AUGUST (INCLUDES TOUR)
- 18 SEPTEMBER
- 16 OCTOBER (INCLUDES TOUR)
- 20 NOVEMBER

## Restoring history



Anyone thinking that the cemetery looks a little bleak with all the palms gone only need ask Allen Tanner what he thinks about these menaces. After months of working with the GMCT and a local

stonemason, he has finally restored a grave that had been decimated by a rogue Canary Palm.

While tracking down ancestors in his wife’s family tree, Mr Tanner found the double grave of the Shearers and Kempes at Coburg Cemetery. Half the plot was filled with the tree and large branches had piled up on top. The metal rails were broken and one of the headstones was completely missing. Percy Kemp M.C., a man who had been awarded a Military Cross after his service in the fields of France, who once sat tall in his wedding photos with his bride Agnes and Albert Jacka V.C. standing at his side, his medals on show, his AIF uniform spick and span and a walking stick hinting at war injuries that eventually killed him, appeared forgotten.

With financial assistance from GMCT’s insurer, Mr Tanner ordered a headstone the same shape and material as the original. A local stonemason cleared the site down to ground level, sand-blasted the granite structure and rebuilt the site. The cast iron fence was restored and painted, the concrete foundations re-laid and strengthened and a fresh layer of white stones has given the grave a fresh, cared-for look. “Despite being an Australian War Hero his grave site was neglected. It should have had more care and attention”, said Mr Tanner. “In fact it would be great if the Australian War Graves Commission now took over the upkeep of his grave site”. The original Bronze plaque was also dug up during restoration which, along with the original grave marker will be reinstalled shortly before a re-dedication and memorial service.





## Master Plan for Development

The Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust (GMCT) is working on a master plan for Coburg Cemetery to improve facilities, address current needs and manage future development of the site. To start the community consultation process, GMCT came along to our February meeting and presented drawings and ideas about planting new trees, redeveloping buildings, creating new niche walls, improving drainage and making room for new graves. Contact the GMCT on 1300 022 298 or [corpcomms@gmct.com.au](mailto:corpcomms@gmct.com.au) for a copy of the master plan.



## Wildlife Watch

Is the number of bunnies in Coburg Cemetery increasing? The rabbit recently spotted with his nets and ferrets didn't have much luck in reducing the population but I'm sure there are a few rabbit stews in his future. (photo by Janette Gellatly)

## A Word from the President

On a walk through a cemetery recently, I spotted and poked an unusual plant that spat at me. I squealed like a kid and mumbled about a triffid attack. No one seemed to know exactly what it was. It turned out to be the toxic "squirting cucumber" (*Ecballium elaterium*). It's uncommon; few of us would have seen one before. This made me think about how often cemeteries are homes for the weird and unusual plants that we would otherwise turn into compost if we found them in our front yards.



We have an unusual heritage rose at Coburg Cemetery, (see *Buried Treasures* newsletter #8) but most of the other trees and bushes are what you might expect to see—and in fact do see—in local gardens. And there are, of course, a few familiar weeds invading paths and graves.

There are many unusual plants found in other cemeteries. There's the blue sedge found in the USA near the site of the grave of a "Queen of the Gypsies", thought to have travelled on clothing or floral gifts to this royal family from Asia or Australia. There are the rare and endangered downy wattle and small leaved Dillwynia at Rookwood Necropolis in Sydney. Boroondara Cemetery has the only known Queensland Kauri tree in a Victorian cemetery and even the National Trust in its "Guidelines for Cemetery Conservation" (2009) describes cemeteries as sources of rare specimens, rare garden flowers and reminds us that many plants are rare except in old cemeteries.

Perhaps we should be looking a little closer at some of those "weeds" in Coburg?

## Members wanted!

Get involved as much or as little as you like. Researching, writing, website updating, fauna and flora surveying, photographing, promoting events, presenting at tours, newsletter editing. Contact us to find out more: [focc.group@gmail.com](mailto:focc.group@gmail.com)

## Cemetery tours around the traps

**Friends of St Kilda Cemetery**  
([info@foskc.org](mailto:info@foskc.org) or 9531 6832)

- [What a Way to Go. Unusual Deaths and a History of the Melbourne Morgue](#), 21 May

**Friends of Cheltenham and Regional Cemeteries** ([info@focrc.org](mailto:info@focrc.org) or [www.focrc.org/tours](http://www.focrc.org/tours))

- [Convicts & Felons](#) June 2016

**Brighton Cemeterians** ( Call Lois: 9558 4248)

- [Elements of the Law](#), 22 May, 2pm
- [The Jewish of the Brighton Cemetery](#), 19 June 2pm
- [Cross Section of Interesting People](#), 22 June 7.30pm
- [The Rulers – Governing the country in deeds not years](#), 2 July, 2pm

## Friends of Coburg Cemetery Inc.

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