

Oktober 2007

Dagsê Belangstellendes in die geskiedenis van ou Pretoria,

Die Kerkplein foto-album waaraan ek op die oomblik werk vorder fluks. Ek het al 45 foto's beskryf. 'n Stadige proses. Soms neem dit 'n paar dae om al die inligting op een foto na te vors en te beskryf. Groete, Rosa Swanepoel

Die volgende kom van Cathy de Beer van Stellenbosch.

'n Paar gedagtes aangaande Westfort

Ons het vir 24 jaar in Pretoria gewoon en was nou bevriend met Dr. Susanne Kok, wat inwonende mediese dr. was te Westfort. Dit was gedurende die sewentiger en vroeg tagtiger jare van die vorige eeu. Dit was 'n instelling van dr. Kok om elke Sondag dieselfde groepie mense vir ete by haar te nooi. Gevolglik was ons later soos 'n familie en het ons dikwels teen sonder op haar ruim voorstoep gesit terwyl die son sak en die bobbejane in die koppe blaf.

Dr. Kok het gewoon in een van die huise teen die kop. Dr. Kok was voorheen vir verskeie jaar in Nigerië op die Jos Plato onder die Tiv werksaam waar sy aan die hoof van 'n sendinghospitaal was. Daar het sy haar in tropiese siektes, waaronder melaatsheid, bekwaam. In die sewentigerjare moes sy Nigerië weens politieke omstandighede aldaar, verlaat waarna sy toe as inwonende mediese dr. te Westfort aangestel is.

Westfort was gedurende daardie jare 'n melaatse hospitaal wat die hele Suider Afrika bedien het en dr. Kok se kennis en ondervinding kon dus baie goed te Westfort gebruik word. Westfort Hospitaal het destyds twee groepe pasiënte bedien, nl. die melaatse pasiënte asook psigiatriese pasiënte. Volgens my inligting was Demitrios Tsafendas wat Dr. Verwoerd vermoor het, o.a. 'n psigiatriese pasiënt te Westfort. Dr Kok het na die melaatse pasiënte omgesien.

By dr. Kok het ons geleer dat melaatsheid nie so aansteeklik was as wat die algemene persepsie was nie. Dit is slegs deur direkte kontak van liggaamvloeistowwe van 'n besmette persoon oorgedra.

Elke Maandag was dit die kliniekdag vir die melaatse pasiënte by Westfort, dan het 'n neuroloog, velspesialis, ortopeet en oogspesialis by die kliniek saam met Dr. Kok daar gewerk.

Kerke: Graag meld ek die Roomse Kerkie op die terrein. Die binnemure van die Kerkie was beskilder met die aanloop tot die Kruistoneel in die Bybel. Wat hierdie beskilderde mure so besonders gemaak het, is dat al die menslike figure se ledemate een of ander vorm van beskadiging gehad het agv melaatsheid!

Die groter Kerk op die terrein was agthoekig gebou, as ek reg onthou.

Argitektuur: Die argitektuur van Westford se geboue was hoofsaaklik sinkargitektuur. Sommige geboue het gedeeltelik rooi baksteenmure gehad wat verder aangevul was deur sink. Ander geboue was volledig van sink gebou. Die algemene indruk van Westfort was egter hoofsaaklik sinkargitektuur. Kimberley het in die vroeë vyftiger jare ook gedeeltes gehad van dieselfde sinkargitektuur.

Sinkargitektuur bestaan deesdae nie eintlik meer nie, maar op Alicedale in die Oos-Kaap was daar nog tot onlangs pragtige voorbeelde.

Dr. Kok moes noodgedwonge in Nigerië leer slange vang om te kan oorleef, want sy moes 'n ent deur digte bosse stap vanaf haar tuiste na die hospitaal. Te Westfort het dit haar goed te pas gekom, aangesien sy dikwels slange gehad het op haar voorstoep. Sy het dan sommer self die slang gevang en teruggeneem na die koppe!

Dr. Kok is oorlede in 1984 aan leukemie, waarna daar 'n Skotse dame wat uit die sendingveld in Afrika gekom het, by Westfort aangestel is as inwonende medikus. Dr. Kok is vanuit die agthoekige kerk begrawe en daar was persone van die Tiv stam teenwoordig wat op die begrafnis gesing het.

Westfort het ook volgens my inligting 'n geskiedenis van Britse magte wat daar gestasioneer was gedurende die Anglo Boere-oorlog.

Weens die twee hospitale te Westfort was toegangsbeheer streng toegepas en is lede van die publiek slegs op die terrein toegelaat indien hulle iemand kom besoek het wat op die terrein gewoon het.

Dit sal werklik jammer wees as so 'n terrein wat eintlik as bewaringsterrein verklaar behoort te word, tot niet gaan.

Cathy de Beer
Stellenbosch

Die volgende van Paul Els.

Thaba Tswhane Cemeteries

In recent years, more and more cemeteries around the country have been deteriorating and especially those that are situated on farms are lost forever. Town councils don't have the funds anymore to maintain cemeteries, and tombstones are being damaged at an alarming rate. Metal crosses are being taken for scrap metal and tombstones pushed over - just for fun.

Once beautiful cemeteries are in such a state that up to 70% of tombstones don't exist anymore. Registers, or parts thereof, of some cemeteries are non-existent.

The South African Geological Society members are in the process of recording information on all graves in South Africa, firstly concentrating on the older and farm cemeteries. Where possible, all graves are being photographed and where they are situated, especially the tombstones on farms, is recorded. The Commonwealth Commission again is restoring graves - world wide - of soldiers who died in WW1 and WW2 and have the funds to maintain them.

Tombstones are great sources of information for the Geological Society in the searches for family history and even which families moved to which areas in the country. This information is stored and is available to anyone doing research on their forefathers. This scenario of cemeteries being neglected is also seen in the old cemetery of The Heights.

Pretoria Cemeteries

Every town has its God's Acre in which rests the remains of loved ones and persons of history. Pretoria's Church Street cemetery bears the remains not only of our local pioneers, but of persons from all over the Republic and from overseas, persons from humble homes and from places who left a mark in the history and the rich heritage of our city and country.

One of the first burial sites in Pretoria was a private cemetery situated at Du Preezhoek on the south-eastern corner of the ground adjoining the railway bridge at the entrance to the Fountains Valley.

Pretoria's old cemetery in Church Street was established in 1867 from which date records have been kept. The war graves register is held by the War Graves Board, a division of the National Monuments Council.

War Graves in South Africa

The number of men and women of the armed services from all parts of the world who died in South Africa during the 1939-1945 War and are buried or commemorated there, is 6,396, including 5,052 South Africans. Their graves are to be found in 521 burial places. In five of these are memorials to 126 who were cremated and in Palmietkuil South War Cemetery there is a memorial erected in memory of 125 South African soldiers who died during the war and lie buried in graves which could not be maintained.

The majority of the war graves in SA are to be found in the larger towns, such as Johannesburg with more than 900 burials, Cape Town with more than 800, Durban and Pretoria each with over 600, Pietermaritzburg with over 200 and Kimberley, Bloemfontein and East London each with over 100 war graves. A number of burials also took place in small villages where military camps had been established, such as The Heights, Cullinan near Pretoria and Palmietkuil (Springs). Throughout South Africa there are many single family burials in farm burial grounds.

Most of the graves of naval casualties are at Simontown, which was the main naval base. Many of the Air Force burials were the result of accidents that occurred during training at the 36 Empire Air Training Schools.

The Heights Cemeteries

The area in and around The Heights was occupied by regiments of the British garrison after the occupation of Pretoria in 1902, and those who died at that time were buried in Church Street Cemetery.

The first Heights cemetery is on the south-western outskirts of the Heights and consists of two cemeteries - one for Europeans and the other for non-Europeans. As far as could be determined the first burial took place in 1904, when the cantonment was first occupied by the garrison forces, namely the Royal North Lancashire Regiment and the Cameron Highlanders.

A tombstone with the inscriptions 'Pte Gaener no. 6766 F/Coy, 2/Warks Regt, June 4th, 1900, at Robert Heights', is found in the cemetery. If Gaener died on June 4th, 1900, the day when Lord Roberts was travelling through the area to take Pretoria the next day and buried here, his tombstone must have been erected a few years later, as the word 'Roberts Heights' appears on it. The oldest graves appear to be of members of the Queen's Bay Regiment (2nd Dragoon Guards) that arrived in Pretoria in September 1904. The regiment returned to England in December 1907. The most remarkable aspect of this cemetery is that it is the only place to which South African soldiers who died abroad prior to 1917 were brought back home for burial. Since that date war victims have not been returned for burial.

The new cemetery was opened during the WWII for war casualties (Commonwealth graves) only and when the old cemetery filled its boundaries the new cemetery was started in 1964, to continue with normal Military and family burials.

All existing tombstones are photographed by the author and are available from the Geological Society.

One young WWII soldier remembered that the old cemetery was a favourable place for young couples to visit during the night, as the MP's must have been afraid of the uniformed ghosts. Each grave stone in the cemetery has a story to tell; let us look deeper and attempt to unravel the history of some of those people.

Old No 1 Military Cemetery

The Old No 1 Military cemetery contains 155 (161) graves of 1914-1918 War Dead, almost all being concentrated to the right-front when one enters the cemetery at its main gate. These graves have headstones of the lighter coloured Paarl granite.

Immediately inside the cemetery, facing the main gate, is the granite Cross of Sacrifice, which has been vandalised several times and moved to its present site during October 1982 when subsidence in the dolomite ground where it previously stood - some 40 metres further to the West -

threatened to cause it to topple over. It also contains 103 graves of 1939-1945 War Dead which are mainly concentrated to the left-front as the cemetery is entered.

This total of 103 consists of 75 South African Army, 27 South African Air Force casualties and 1 Belgian. Among these casualties are the 1st South African Division Commander Maj-Genl Dan Pienaar, CB, DSO, and members of the Divisional Staff who were killed when the aircraft in which they were returning to the Union shortly after the Battle of Alamein crashed at Kisumu in Uganda during December 1942. Their graves are all marked by headstones cut from the dark blue/grey Bon Accord granite.

In the cemetery the graves are also to be found of members of the Royal Air Force boxing team who were killed on 6 June 1938 in an air crash near the Limpopo River, when the team was returning to South Africa after participating in tournaments in Rhodesia. Members of the SAAF air crew killed at the same time are buried alongside (read story in chapter).

Even in modern times, that small Six Mile Spruit (now also referred to as Hennops River) could at times come down forcibly when in flood. A tombstone here of Sapper H Barnett bears the inscription - age 27, drowned whilst swimming in the Six Mile Spruit, January 16th, 1909.

A sad story of 1910 is told on the stone erected by Lt Cope of the RAMC, "Allan, 4th son aged 6 months and 4th daughter, Gwladys Constance, age 14 months".

What story lies hidden between two stones on a single grave? The older stone records the death of Sidwell Harries, FA, who died on October 21st, 1918. The second 'newer' stone at the base of the grave gives the information: P S Harries, SA Field Artillery, who died on the same day and year; how did they die, and why was the second stone erected at a (much) later stage?

Air Corporal William Henry Johns was killed by a bullet which entered through the visor of the tank,¹ during the unrest in Benoni on March 13th, 1922.

A few young troopers from the Special Service Battalion are buried here and the youngest is 16.

GENERAL INFORMATION AND PHOTO'S

It is reminded that these cemeteries were only for Military personnel and their families. With special promotion a few civilians are buried in these cemeteries.

In 1990 the Commonwealth War Grave Commission took over the task to maintain all Commonwealth graves, and a security fence was erected around both old Cemeteries which housed the Commonwealth graves. Why the Commonwealth new cemetery was started and the old one not extended, during WWII, is a mystery.

During January 2000 a large (35m diameter and 4m deep) sinkhole developed in the cemetery. About 15 graves have disappeared into the sinkhole and more than 125 other graves are affected by substantial surface cracking and subsidence. To prevent further loss of graves, the affected area was rehabilitated by back filling with imported materials and compacted by heavy construction equipment. The damage was repaired at the cost of R570 000 in 2001



Left: Letchford, Private. H. Born: 1888 Died: Nov 20th, 1912. Aged 24. D Coy 1st Bn Royal Scots Fusrs. F/No 9828 (buried outside the old cemetery)

After the Anglo-Boer War, a soldier of the British Occupation Garrison in Pretoria, Private H. Letchford of D Company, 1st Battalion the Royal Scots Fusiliers, was court marshalled for allegedly misappropriating canteen funds. He was sentenced to death and executed by firing squad on November 20th, 1912

and subsequently buried in unconverted ground just outside the cemetery boundary at Roberts Heights.

In subsequent years his headstone had to be repeatedly repaired because of lightning strikes. His family took up the case and with proper legal representation, Pte Letchford was found to be innocent. His service record and name were cleared and his grave consecrated. The cemetery boundary fence was moved to enclose the grave, incorporating it into the cemetery. After this process was completed, his grave has never been struck by lightning again (Col Graham C L Du Toit, ret).

Old No 2 Military Cemetery

This non-European cemetery is situated a few hundred metres west of the Old No 1 Military Cemetery. It is also divided into two sections: one for Commonwealth graves and the other for non-European soldiers and civilians that worked for the Defence Force. The commonwealth section contains 29 graves of 1914-1918 War Dead, all members of the South African Military or Labour Corps Units, and 166 graves of 1939-1945 War Dead, marked by Commission headstones of the dark blue-grey Bon Accord type granite. 164 are South African Army personnel, 1 South African Naval Forces casualty and 1 Belgian. These graves are concentrated in the eastern end of the cemetery. A Cross of Sacrifice stands in front. Two civilian graves are also in the borders of the Commonwealth cemetery. Inside the cemetery, facing east, is a granite Cross of Sacrifice.

Just behind this enclosed section of the cemetery is the civilian section, for non-Europeans. There are only 35 tombstones left out of an estimated 350. Also, a register is non-existent and the oldest stone is dated 1933.

New Military Cemetery

At the end of 1963 a new cemetery was established north of the Commonwealth cemetery, on the western side of the Heights. The new cemetery now consists of four sections, namely: the Commonwealth - which includes the Border War "Heroes' Acre"; the normal Military section; - the children's section and the Columbarium walls (started in 1982). The graves were numbered: the children's graves are numbered from no 1 (+- 210), the adults from number 400 (+- 1500 graves), and the Columbarium walls numbered as per wall. The extension of the new cemetery started in August of 2006.

The cemetery contains 293 Commonwealth war graves, 191 of the SA Army (two of which are alternative commemorations), 81 of the SAAF, 1 of the British Army and 20 of the RAF. There are also 1 Belgian and 1 Greek grave of the Second World War and 1 non-war grave. The cemetery has two Crosses of Sacrifice on a platform feature and is maintained (as are the other Thaba Tshwane cemeteries) by the Department of Public Works.



Photo of the new Cemetery through the ages.

The Columbarium

The Wall of Remembrance known as the Columbarium is to be found at the highest point overlooking the cemetery. The name Columbarium comes from the ancient Latin word for the structure which housed doves, since the wall has 240 “pigeonholes”, called niches, in which the ashes of cremated persons may be stored. The symbol of the dove representing eternal peace is very fitting for those who have passed away, and they will be remembered by future generations. Instead of physically storing the ashes in the Columbarium (Wall of Remembrance) another wall has been created with a different end in mind, called the ‘Cremation Memorial Wall’. There are no niches as in the Columbarium. However, ashes may be scattered in front of this wall over a protected lawn. A plaque on the wall then commemorates the person whose ashes have been dispersed in this manner.

General Information

Among the casualties in this cemetery are the members who died in the aircraft accident in Cape Town, on May 25th, 1971, when three aircraft flew into Table Mountain. Eight of the members were buried on June 2nd, 1971.

There are nine² Border War graves or stones in the Commonwealth area of the new cemetery and the area is called the “Heroes’ Acre”. Two well known SADF members, Maj Ed Every (Mirage pilot, shot down and his body never recovered) and Col Corrie Meerholz, HC, (Special Forces) who died in a motorcar accident, are among the stones.

An unknown soldier was buried in the new cemetery in September 1983, in grave 1237 and recorded as a Special Forces member who died in Angola on September 9th, 1983, in the register. No stone - just an empty stand.

Unknown to many, a black Special Forces member was buried in 1978 in the cemetery and the marking on the stone only gives his name “Arau”. He became thus the first black soldier to be buried in this cemetery. (Arão Shilemba of 5 Recce died - August 19th, 1978, in Rhodesia.³)

² According the cemetery register a Paratrooper Cpl is also buried here. There is no indication of a stone .

³ Arão and the author where together and served in this operation that caused his death.