FAWKNER MEMORIAL PARK

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For those who deplore the neglected graveyards of yesterday, and the marble lined cemeteries of today, the Fawkner Memorial Park will come as a welcome relief. To lift the shadow of death and reveal the beauty of everlasting life, has forever been the object of creators of this remarkable institution.¹

284 acres of open land and scattered red gums, beside the Sydney Road, became a memorial park. Under Charles Robert Heath's planning and direction, as an architect and secretary to the Board of Managers, the land became an oasis of the north. More than a place for resting souls, it possessed a splendidly romantic essence; that of vistas to far-away temples; that of slender trunked gums and bowing palms. At the end of the 1930s, when most of the architectural development was complete, and the trees had matured to 30 years of age the park had reached its culmination. It had become a natural parkland, possessing the character of a rural by-road with its native and exotic planting set in the long and waving grass. The small stream at the top of the site flowed strongly at that time.

In 1906 Charles Heath ARVIA drew a plan-pattern which was said to be geometric but possessed none of the predictability of geometry; having variety and yet order. It was compared to a spider's web half complete. A similarly organic plan framed the garden suburb of Dacey Gardens, Sydney, in 1912 where curving streets allowed inboard private 'commons' for residents in much the way that Burley Griffin created his Glenard and Mount Eagle Estates at Heidelberg, Victoria. From what was planned originally, at Fawkner, as a clock tower, the magical number of seven radial roads fanned away to the west, south and north. The central road of the seven led to the temple, the site of the Crematorium; the building not being constructed until much later, in 1927.²

Other nuclei formed on these major axes, centred on waiting-shelters, chapel sites, and ornamental ponds. There were to be entrances at the north, east (present main entrance) and the south, as well as an entrance just for those of Jewish faith. A railway terminus served the cemetery as an answer to its decentralised location bringing burial within twenty minutes of the Melbourne GPO. All of this was given the name: The New Melbourne General Cemetery and later, The Fawkner Memorial Park.
Melbourne already possessed two 'Melbourne cemeteries' at that time. The first was situated south of the Victorian Market, between Queen and William Street, and was bounded by Franklin Street to the south. It commenced with the burial of one John Smith in 1837. Another, situated in Carlton, was the Melbourne General which opened its gates in 1853. Fifty years later, both cemeteries were well populated and thus Fawkner became the site for the New Melbourne General, opening on the 28th November 1906 and the first burial was that of Dorothy Knapp, aged four.

The only building of any consequence, existing at the time of the cemetery's opening was the caretaker's house and offices: an attic-storey house of the Edwardian era, situated opposite the present offices in its own private gardens. This was designed by Heath and he was listed as resident there in 1912. It was not until the crematorium was constructed in 1927, however, that the Classical essence of the park was established.

Though drawing on Greek Revival architecture as a stylistic precedent used in contemporary institutional buildings, the style chosen for the crematorium was apt for terminating distant vistas. The shining white columns of the portico could be just discerned through the flanking trees.

'Here at the Melbourne Crematorium is the very finest of cremation procedure; the Chapels - set in a region of peace and tranquility - afford protection from the extremes of weather.'

Here also the Classical Revival served much the same romantic purpose as at the end of the eighteenth century in England, when the Picturesque was in vogue. Pavilions, such as that at Fawkner, would be glimpsed, shining across a lake or perhaps on a rise in the centre of a wood. An example is Stourhead, in Wiltshire, where a picturesque 'landscape garden' was created in 1740 around a Palladian style villa by Henry Hoare. In this garden, scaled down versions of Baalbec's Temple of the Sun and the Pantheon of Rome took their sites on water sides and hill tops.

The Fawkner Crematorium, in its total development, consisted of two chapels: one large edifice and a smaller structure which was added (now known as the Eastern and Southern Chapels). The Doric portico of the larger chapel faced the approach along Fourth Avenue and potted ornamental cypress
The Crematorium, Fawkner Memorial Park, c. 1940
Looking along Fourth Avenue to the Crematorium, c. 1940
trees took their place on either side of the steps to its podium. To reach the chapel a small stream was bridged whilst what appeared to have been ornamental ponds flanked the immediate approach to it.

The use of Greek Revival was not peculiar to this building in Melbourne. Public Works Chief Architect, E. Evan Smith had used such a style in 1926 for the Emily McPherson College of Domestic Economy, Russell Street and won the RVIA Street Architecture Medal four years later. The 'simplified classical' portico of the new Melbourne Wool Exchange had been constructed to face King Street as early as 1913-14. It was designed by Purchas and Teague.9 These buildings were eclectic but also possessed a modern simplification which determined that detail was foregone to create an emphasis on the whole. The temple tomb at Halicarnassus (313 B.C.) inspired the winning design in the 1922-3 competition for the National War Memorial of Victoria. The Greek Revival began to dominate designs of both commercial and commemorative buildings after the First War.

The revival style was adapted from these precedents, at Springvale Crematorium. The Boyd Chapel there was designed in 1936 by Percy Everett in a most uncharacteristic style, but it fitted the established milieu of funerary architecture.10

Previous to the introduction of a chapel at Springvale, a rather simple structure housed the incinerator or 'reducing chamber' and indeed the first cremation here was performed in an earthen pyre. It required tons of wooden fuel and twelve gallons of gasoline for ignition: this was 1904.11

Presumably Fawkner too employed such archaic methods but the Fawkner Crematorium was soon able to claim to be the first 'modern' crematorium in Melbourne, where other functions, such as the funeral service, could be undertaken, apart from mere incineration.

The interior of the Fawkner Eastern Chapel was also consistent with the Greek manner: Ionic columns supported the stylobate which spanned the marble catafalque at the end of the room. However the funeralel arrangements which transpired within this chamber epitomised all of the advantages of contemporary technology.
At the commencement of the service the coffin is placed by bearers on the catafalque, and is at the committal period, silently lowered and transported into the Reducing Chamber, where after an hours time all that remains is a small quantity of pearly white ash. The sunlight filtering through the French casement windows on either side of the Chapel, the colorful potted shrubs and flowers and the sweet soft toned organ music all add to that feeling of comfort and consolation experienced by those who attend.\textsuperscript{12}

Cremation, such as described above, was still alien to many. A Parliamentary member, Mr Knox MLA said in 1938: '...Another mystery to him was what happened to those costly caskets that were used in conveying a body to a crematorium. Surely they are not used again'. This was said during the Cemeteries Bill debate.

'Every casket is passed into the incineration chamber - no adornments or embellishments of any kind shall be removed from a coffin...' retorted the chairman of the Springvale Necropolis and Crematorium, Mr J. H. Boyd.\textsuperscript{13}

Such was the public suspicion concerning cremation: a suspicion harking from the 1890s and continuing well into the twentieth century. Stated one observer, in the 1940s '...[with] the accumulating total of interments, the public attitude to the question of disposal and memorial provision may reasonably be assumed to undergo a complete change.'

The Fawkner Crematorium ceiling exhibited shallow plaster-made vaulting. The walls possessed, not mural friezes but ceramic tile dadoes with geometric border-patterning along their upper edges. The doors and window casements were executed in bronze work with the familiar Greek-derived, saltire crosses on the top-lights. Similarly bronze lighting brackets thrust out from the walls to symbolise flaming torches: the shaft geometrically composed; the flame an opal sphere. The whole was conceived in shades of ivory and grey with soft highlights of colour in the border patterns.

To the south of the Eastern Chapel another smaller chapel was constructed, designed in 1937 by Frank Heath. Attached to the earlier building, it formed what might have been another entrance porch, Palladian-style and on axis, but it did not achieve this. It possessed no portico and it was entered from the the side only.
Here a provincial Greek/Italian interior was created: timber truss work and exposed rafters with simple plastered walls and a chequer-pattern floor. Over the marble catafalque a mural was painted. The mural,\textsuperscript{14} painted by Christian Waller, depicts the 'Hymn of the Robe of Glory' using basic Christian symbolism in a Pre-Raphaelite medium (Christian Waller was the wife of M. Napier Waller, the famed mural artist of the war memorial in Canberra). This chapel and its mural have since been demolished and replaced with a piece of anachronistic architecture by the Memorial Park Committee of Management.

Further architectural work followed in the construction of the Garden of Remembrance. This was initiated in 1931.\textsuperscript{15} In March 1934 the tender of W. U. Broderick of Fairfield was accepted for further work on the garden and the associated building.\textsuperscript{16} In the final construction of the Garden a walled enclosure had been created to house interment niches, statuary and burial urns formed from buff terracotta. The whole, together with an adjoining tea-room and flower kiosk, was constructed of tapestry brickwork on a terracotta faience base.

The kiosk was designed in the manner of a miniature Italian provincial villa and included full height arched openings, formed in moulded terracotta, and symmetrically placed on the four sides. Subsequent alterations here have caused the filling-in of some of these openings with ill matched split-face concrete masonry. At the time of its construction, the familiar name of Cr R. J. Hardy, Melbourne City Councillor, was listed as Chairman of the Management Board. C. R. Heath ARAIA carried out the architectural work.\textsuperscript{17}

Alongside the quadrangle created by the kiosk and Garden of Remembrance, a Classically symmetrical Rose-Urn garden was laid out, and completed by 1938.\textsuperscript{18} Here a delightful miniature sixteenth century Baroque style garden is re-created: access ways turn around tight concentric rectangles which are dispersed, in turn, around a central pond. The rose bushes are planted in similarly concentrically disposed beds.

'Catch the fragrance of the breathing rose...' whispered the brochure, advertising the Memorial Park. One Memorial Rose Bush with inscribed bronze tablet might cost as little as fifteen guineas to immortalise the ashes thereunder.\textsuperscript{19}
The Rose Garden, c.1940

The Administrative Offices, Fawkner Memorial Park, c.1940
Taking the Baroque theme to its culmination, a grand stairway ascended from the gardens to the nearby railway platform. Established from a disused branch line, the siding provided for burial trains and was activated soon after the opening of the cemetery. The grandness of this stair is ironically counterpointed by the Victorian Railways' more modest vertical boarded sheds which form the station buildings.

The Administration Office was next in the gradual materialisation of the architectural dots shown on Heath's original garden plan of 1906. The Greek Revival style now changes subtly: it is still derived from the Classical but overt eclecticism falls away. Columnar elements and decorative details are discarded and instead, bland volumes, one symmetrically set beside the other are sculpted in tapestry-textured clinker bricks to form the walls of the office. The shingle tile replaces the Marseilles pattern of the earlier buildings and the emphasis moves to the austerity associated with modern architecture. The nearby bus shelter is a further example of austerely expressed brick massing. Beside it, a memorial drinking fountain presents the abstract epitomisation of the geometric interlocking volumes, created with the masonry of the time, both in domestic and public buildings. This was in 1937 when domestic architecture ranged from Neo Tudor to Frank Lloyd Wright and commercial buildings had taken the severe geometric forms not far removed from the funerary styles, such as of the Springvale Necropolis and a dozen or so war memorials before it.

Subsequent to 1937, in architectural terms, no improvements have been accomplished at Fawkner. Instead, additions of other minor chapels to the Crematorium in the 1960s and the imposition of a wrought-iron pipe pergola on to the portico of the original chapel have meant destruction of the original impact of its simplicity. These additions do not match external detail and revert selfishly to the 1960s vernacular in their interiors. The Administration Offices, no doubt from necessity, have been drastically altered internally and a porch added to the front.

A more meaningful addition to the Memorial Park since 1937, was the construction of the Charles Robert Heath Fountain placed where he had originally drawn a clock tower on the original plan, central to the entrance. It records his 40 years as surveyor of the Cemetery until near his death in 1948, aged 81.
This is a hurried picture of Fawkner. A picture which was brightest at the end of the 1930s, but still remains in part today. Despite incidental demolition and alteration of Charles Heath's carefully considered memorial architecture, there still remains the Garden of Remembrance, the Rose Urn Garden and the service buildings clustered nearby. The trees, though the palms are fewer, remain in large number. The reedy grass is gone, and the rivulet has dried up. The character of each avenue may be perceived by their variation: silver, golden and Lombardy poplars, golden, Bhutan and the funereal cypress: lemanii gums and the camphor laurel all mark a special place for the reclining dead.

As naturally as a glade opens in a wood among the outer trees, glimpses, vistas and pictures will unfold; but none affronting the other any more than the whole conclusion and aspect of the Garden shall be at odds with the surroundings. 22

Indeed there between the railway line and the busy Sydney Road and close to the grasping suburban subdivisions, it is hoped the Gardens might survive 'at odds with the surroundings' and not dissolve into the anonymous urban landscape. A history of bad decisions by management however make this likely.
REFERENCES

1. The Fawkner Memorial Park, (brochure), Ruskin Press, Melbourne, c.1940.
2. ibid., also Argus, June 1927.
3. Isaac Selby, Memorial History of Melbourne, Melbourne, 1934, p.3.
5. Fawkner Burial Register, 10 November 1906.
6. Frank Heath (verbal).
10. Springvale Necropolis and Crematorium records, as abstracted by Mr Mountford, Manager.
11. ibid.
12. The Fawkner Memorial Park, op. cit.
14. To be incorporated in the new crematorium.
15. Information from Frank Heath, also plaque gives establishment date as 1933.
17. Plaque.
19. The Fawkner Memorial Park, op. cit.
20. Plaque, also Decoration and Glass, December 1938.
22. The Fawkner Memorial Park, op. cit.

This article has also been based on photographs supplied by Frank Heath, Charles Heath's son. Frank inherited the practice and worked on Fawkner in the late 1930s. All photographs in the article were taken from the brochure The Fawkner Memorial Park, c.1940.