Melbourne has three private memorials which were, in simpler times, public curiosities and attractions. Their popularity has declined in recent decades for a variety of reasons. Today despite their aesthetic and historic interest and importance they are virtually unknown.

In the closing years of the last century and the first few of this, suburban cemeteries were a Saturday attraction (Sunday then being a full working day). Box Hill and Kew (Boroondara) Cemeteries, then fairly new, were suitable distance from the city to be reached by the newly popular bicycles and train system. Both destinations were on the Box Hill line, the outer cemetery being only a kilometre from the station and reached by path to a pedestrian entrance. Kew was the same distance from Barker, on a now dismantled spur.

The spectacular memorials were raised to the memories of Sidney Myer (née Simcha Baevski) at Box Hill and David Syme and Mrs John Springthorpe (née Annie Inglis) at Kew.

All three had notable architectural pedigrees. For reasons as disparate as the monuments themselves, all have survived their respective 45, 75 and 86 years with varying degrees of success.

The youngest, that of Sidney Myer, is the only structure in the country to have been designed by the British Empire's most famous and successful architect: Sir Edwin Lutyens R.A. ¹

Myer died late in 1934 outside his Toorak home. Lutyens was commissioned in the same year but in a more familiar time-scale the working drawings were not prepared until 1938 and then by the young firm of Yuncken Freeman Griffith (1933-). The memorial was completed and dedicated the same year. It is carefully maintained and contains to date the subject, his wife and a still-born grandson.

At the time of the Myer commission Lutyens was building New Delhi and Pretoria as well as running an immensely successful practice in London. What chutzpah brought together a Russian-born store owner who had started his life in Australia as a hawker and the world-famous Lutyens?
His design for Melbourne's merchant prince consisted of three elements; a pergola, a cenotaph and a walled lawn which is a plot's length wide and ten metres long. The pergola consists of bleached teak beams carried on doric columns of Stawell freestone. The memorial's site stretches across a dozen standard plots. Its linear design is thus set parallel rather than perpendicular to the access path. Therefore the main aspect, approach and most photographs are from the side. Photographs give a false idea of the memorial's size. On inspection, its seemingly monumental proportions are found to be, in fact, almost domestic in scale.

On the other hand both the Springthorpe and Syme memorials are truly monumental. They compete with each other, being on opposite sides of the cemetery's main roadway. Both tombs are vastly greater in height and breadth than any other structure in Boroondara.

Syme's tomb was erected to the memory of the publisher, political economist and one of the greatest public figures of Victorian Victoria. It was designed by Arthur Peck. The style is Egyptian, domesticated, but even then the columns are six or seven metres high. As in the case of Sidney Myer, those left acted quickly and commissioned the architect very soon after the subject's death. Unlike Myer's, Syme's tomb was built in the year of his death (1908). It is constructed of two materials; granite and copper. Because of this fortuitous choice the simple impressive tomb has remained in mint condition, requiring little maintenance.

It is a material success but something less than a social triumph. Despite or because of its impressive form and fame, later generations of the Syme family chose not to be buried there. They chose certainly smaller but, to contemporary eyes, still grand tombs in Box Hill, designed by the same Arthur Peck.²

The Springthorpe Memorial was commissioned and built in 1897. It is almost certainly the country's most lavish tomb and for many years was its most famous. It is clearly marked on the map at the cemetery's gate lodge, an honour afforded no other grave.

It occupies a hillock; an area of about 1000 meters. The land was once meticulously landscaped and fenced. It contained granite seats, a sundial
Syme family tomb, Box Hill cemetery

David Syne's tomb, Kew cemetery
and an elaborate gateway. These minor elements are grouped around the tomb itself which is a classic Greek temple in an adaption (i.e. coarsened) of the Ionian order but the domed, glazed roof is Roman in inspiration. The columns of Labrador granite are interposed with iron balustrading. The centre piece is an allegorical sculpture representing death and eternal life thereafter. Contemporary newspaper descriptions were as lavish as the tomb itself. The Argus called it 'the most beautiful thing of its kind in Australia' and David's Age noted obliquely that 'the beauty of the memorial is paralleled by the symmetry of dates and seasons'.

The Springthorpe Memorial was reputedly its designer's first commission. Harold Desbrowe Annear went on to become successful and popular. His real fame however was to come many years after his death. One of his last commissions was the grand fence and gates of Cranlana, Sidney Myer's stately Toorak home outside of which the owner was to die in 1934 at the age of 57.

Why Annear was commissioned to design the tomb and coordinate the work of some of the era's most famous artists and craftsmen remains a mystery. For many years after this commission he eschewed classicism and the houses from those years would make him known, perhaps unjustifiably, as a pioneer modern architect. With the passage of the years and success and from what one can gather, an exciting private life Annear achieved fame. He also returned to the classic orders which he had used to such dramatic effect in his early commission.

To house the remains of his client's young wife, dead in childbirth and later the client himself, Annear commissioned two expatriate sculptors, Bertram Mackennal and Webb Gilbert to create the central Greek inscriptions and William Bedford cast and set them. James Marriott forged the roof light and Brooks Robinson glazed it with crimson and pink stained glass.

The cost of it all was ten thousand five hundred pounds. This was at a time when a workingman's house, in an as yet unfedrated Australia, cost about three hundred pounds.

Today the peripheral paving has subsided. The diadem of the reclining figure has been broken off. The guardian angel now gazes tenderly down on a
Springthorpe Memorial, Kew cemetery
Sidney Myer Memorial, Box Hill cemetery
steel dowel. The sundial has been damaged and the encircling fence has gone. The roof is missing a score of fish-scale panes. The garden has gone to weed.

In her short life Annie Springthorpe would have heard of David Syme. Apart from his fame they lived in the same suburb, Kew. Sidney Myer she would not have known. Two rich, fortunate men both giants in their widely separated worlds and a rich, but unlucky young woman. Yet in death Annie Springthorpe was to achieve, at least for a few years, great fame.

She was born and was married on the same day 26 January, twenty years apart. The date of her death is given (in art nouveau mosaic tiling) as 26 January 1897. This is incorrect. Her death had not in fact maintained the symmetry of her short life. She had died on the 23rd of January and had been interred in her own family's (Inglis) grave. Her reinterment was arranged to preserve the coincidental dates. Her fame is all the more remarkable when one realises that her magnificent resting place carries no mention of her name: she for who it was all planned, carved, cast, wrot, glazed and paid for is now forgotten.

Eighty years after it was completed the Springthorpe Memorial was placed on the Register of Historic Buildings (Number 522). It then became officially accepted as part of our architectural and historic heritage (something our grandparents already knew) and as such became eligible for public funds for maintenance; if and when funds are available.

Today No. 522 has a crying need for some informed assistance.
A NOTE ON SOURCES

This article has drawn heavily on information readily provided by Marshall Slattery, the noted cemetologist. As well I have drawn my information from many other sources. During the winter of 1981 two cemetery tours were organized by the Council for the Historic Environment and various members carried out research for us. The Royal Victorian Institute of Architects Journal played its traditional role as a prime source. However the real reason why the Springthorpe memorial is so elaborate was told to me by my mother (b. 1877) but it has no place in public discussion - yet.

REFERENCES

1. Sir Edwin Lutyens R.A. was born in Oxford in 1869. He served his articles and began practice in 1889 at the age of 20. His career came to full flower during the Edwardian era when he designed what were to be the last of the great English country houses. For good measure he designed two of the last castles to be built; Lindisfarne Castle and Castle Drogo. He merged his Arts and Crafts training with the newly popular Classicism.

After the Great War his cenotaph at Whitehall was copied throughout the Empire; for example in Sydney's Martin Place. His personal interpretation of Beaux Arts values as illustrated in his magnificent design for New Delhi is now being re-assessed and re-appreciated. He never visited Australia.

2. As far as can be ascertained, the Pecks who have dotted the profession's rolls in Victoria for over a hundred years come from three unrelated families. Arthur Peck was born in Fitzroy in 1855 and educated in the United Kingdom. He was a councillor of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects for many years. He designed the green-tiled obelisk in St Kilda's Alfred Square. That art nouveau monument was raised to the memory of the sixty-eight local men who died in the South African War. In the depression of 1878 Peck and sixteen others decided to try their luck looking for gold in New Guinea. On their way back, the remaining thirteen, sick and adrift were rescued by an American ship, the Sir Lancelot. They were brought back but via Japan, illustrating a mobility which could contain a lesson for the profession in these straitened times.

3. Harold Desbrowe Annear was born in Bendigo in 1865. According to his entry in the Australian Dictionary of Biography (by George Tibbits) he set himself up in practice in 1889, thus gainsaying the romantic 'first job' story repeated in the above text. His best extant works are the three houses in The Byrie, Ivanhoe. His huge stucco houses for R. D. Elliot (Toorak) and John Syme (South Yarra) were demolished in the 1960s. He practiced from a house in Tivoli Place, South Yarra and in that small street worked on no fewer than six houses. His distinctive windows and chimneys can be easily identified in the inner suburbs. A colorful personality, he cut a dashing figure across Melbourne's professional and bohemian society in the first third of this century. He spoke authoritively of the glories of Europe but had never in fact been beyond the Heads.
General landscape plan of Fawkner Memorial Park