

# Grave concerns at cemetery

By JEN REWELL

**Karrakatta cemetery's gravesite renewal process is causing more pain to the families of dead Australian service people with one relative describing it as "blackmail".**

Anne Mobilia used the term for the \$3000 fee that she will have to pay to the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board to retain the headstone of her father, Victor Carter.

And Claremont resident Gavin Wilkinson knows the anguish of having a relative's gravesite renewed.

When his great-uncle James Burrows' gravestone was removed, Mr Wilkinson said it took "18 months of persuasion" for the grave to be reinstated – though at no cost to his family.

The renewal process involves the MCB removing monuments from selected areas of the cemetery, and new graves being dug in between the old sites.

Some of the more impressive looking monuments are kept, but others are shifted to nearby walls and corners.

Soldiers' headstones were among those removed until a memorandum of understanding was reached between the MCB and the Office of Australian War Graves.

Some soldiers' graves are now hidden under footpaths and walls, and many have had their headstones moved.

Nedlands man John Cooke said he was advised by the MCB that the "existing monumental work" on his great-grandfather's grave would be removed and he would have to make a submission for the gravestone to be kept, and pay \$3000 for a new right of burial.



*Victor Carter and his wife Elizabeth. They married after he enlisted in 1915, and he did not return to Australia until 1919, when he met his first child.*

"I feel for everyone who has gone through this process," he said.

"It's deeply disrespectful to those interred in an unmarked grave, and their families."

MCB CEO Kathlene Oliver said a grant of right of burial was needed to retain a headstone in a renewal area.

Grants were made for a specific person, lasted for 25 years and could only be extended or transferred to someone else during that time for a fee.

If the grant holder died, they

could be transferred via probate for a fee.

Letters were not sent out to inform people that the grant was running out.

"Anecdotally, where there are still family connections to the grave with ongoing visitation, the families are more likely to put in a submission requesting the headstone is retained," Ms Oliver said.

She said the headstones of 91 veterans had been removed early in the renewal process.

An official commemoration could not be reinstated in some cases.

Mr Cooke said that seeing his name in stone at Karrakatta – the name has been passed on through at least four generations – was sobering and brought him closer to his family.

His great-grandfather Private John James Cooke died in 1948, having served in the 11th Battalion 3rd Infantry Brigade, which was famously photographed on the Great Pyramid of Khufu (Cheops) in Egypt before they were shipped to Gallipoli.

"My great grandad was in the first battalion to land at Gallipoli and survived being shot, only to go back to the Western Front where he was gassed," Mr Cooke said.

Victor Carter's family were struggling to come up with the money for a new burial grant.

His World War I experiences gave him nightmares all his life, but he did not talk about his experiences with his family.

"As a child, I had no idea of the horror he'd been through: the bombs, the creatures crawling all over them, the mud," Anne Mobilia said.

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*Gavin Wilkinson pays his respects at his great-uncle's grave, which was removed during a "renewal" process and reinstated at no cost after "18 months of persuasion".*

# Grave concerns

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Her father continued to struggle into his 80s, having flashbacks at night, sitting up in bed and struggling with an unseen enemy.

“If a movie about it came on, he’d say: ‘I’ve had enough of that’ and leave the room,” she said.

She said the family wanted their father’s war service honoured.

When Victor died and was buried in Karrakatta, Ms Mobilia requested his official commemoration be placed at his gravesite, but the Office of Australian War Graves put it at the nearby Perth War Cemetery.

She was informed recently that his gravesite was approaching “renewal” and the family would need to repurchase the burial grant.

“It’s getting very upsetting to see other people have a proper stone and my father doesn’t,” Anne said.

“It’s a blackmail of \$3000. It doesn’t seem right, does it? It just makes it all the worse.”

Victor’s youngest brother Harold was killed at Gallipoli and another brother, Ernest, was killed at Bullecourt, France.

After enlisting, Victor married his sweetheart Elizabeth before he left for Egypt in October 1914. He was wounded twice in France.

Their first child was born while he was on service.

“He did not see his first child till she was four years old,” Anne said.

Back in Australia, Victor was a carpenter who would sometimes spend months in Broome, making coffins for pearl divers.



These graves and headstones at the Perth War Cemetery are looked after 'in perpetuity'.

## D-Day for Cott norfolk pines?

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mayor Lorraine Young asked council administration to qualify how many of the pines were listed as heritage.

The council considered incorporating the arborist’s recommendations calling for public consultation on its tree masterplan next February.

It will make a final decision on any consultation on Tuesday.

The CarbonArbor report says it is hard to predict lifespan of the pines because of environmental changes.

A 2008 arborist report obtained by the council after it had been told the lifespan was 100 years noted that a mature tree on Norfolk Island painted by Captain Cook’s botanist Joseph Banks in 1774 was still healthy (*Cott pines can live beyond 100 years*, POST, November 12, 2008).

They take about 80 years to reach maturity.

The latest report says many of Cottesloe’s pines suffered a severe disease when the 2019 drought stressed

them and made them vulnerable to fungal pathogens carried by wind.

Some trees died, the dieback beginning at their tops, in 2020-21, and had to be removed because there is no known cure.

A number of trees have recovered since then as rainfall has stabilised, the report said.

However, rainfall is on a downward trend, and temperatures are rising.

The report lists a number of native trees that it says should be replacements for dead trees outside the heritage avenues.

They include tuarts, once endemic to the western suburbs, plus sheoaks, bottlebrush, peppermint, chinese tallow, coastal blackbutt, olive trees and hakea.

City Beach botanist Kingsley Dixon said norfolk island pines in the metro area have become a crucial food source for black cockatoos (*Pine pollen pall*, POST, September 2).

The meeting was told that public consultation will take place later this year or early next year.