

Pioneers lose the family plot

By LINDA CALLAGHAN

Lorraine Allchurch went to put birthday flowers on her mother's grave – and found it had been bulldozed.

“I thought I had made a mistake, and I walked round and round trying to find it,” she said.

Ms Allchurch said her mother's ashes were buried in the grave at Karrakatta less than two years ago and she had been promised she would be contacted before any work was done in the area.

“The cemetery board wrote to me on March 1 and said I would be contacted prior to any renewal work,” she said.

Her great-grandmother, grandmother, mother and aunt were buried in the plot.

A spokesman for the cemetery said a mistake was made.

Ms Allchurch said: “My mother always said she wanted to be buried with her mother, but when she died they told me she could not be buried because there were already three bodies in the grave.

“So she was cremated at the cemetery and they opened the grave to put her ashes in.”

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Lorraine Allchurch's mother's ashes were buried in a grave two years ago but now there is no sign of it. Picture Paul McGovern.

Pioneers lose

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Ms Allchurch, a past-president of the Curtin Liberal Party and campaign manager for former Premier Richard Court, said she knew the 100-year-old grave was in an area being considered for new graves but had submitted a request to the cemetery board to preserve it because of the family's pioneering history in York and the North-West.

Ms Allchurch of Venn Street Peppermint Grove, said cemetery staff told her last year the grant of right of burial over the grave had expired in the 1970s.

"They told me I could make a submission to the board based on the significance of the family as pioneers," she said.

"I did, and I thought I was having a dialogue."

She said she would have renewed the grant of right of burial and would have replaced the headstones with a new one to suit the board, if required.

"I wanted to make this happen," she said.

"I nursed my mother for four years. I would have done anything to fix it up."

Ms Allchurch said she told cemetery staff that four members of the family frequently visited the grave at Christmas and on birthdays and Mother's Day.

"I drive by the cemetery regularly and I would give them a wave and say: 'Hello, girls, I hope you are all happy there'."

Ms Allchurch said the women were all buried together because they moved to Perth after the deaths of their husbands and the sale of the family farm in York.

She had sent the cemetery a copy of a family entry in the 1913 Cyclopaedia of Western Australia to support her application to preserve the grave.

"Women did not work in those days, but they did do a lot of voluntary work and put a lot back into the community.

"When Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital was built my mother was one of the first women there to start the women's auxiliary."

Steve James, client relations consultant for the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board, said: "We did err. We did undertake that we would let her know. Unfortunately, we did miss that."

Mr James said there were 80 graves in the section being prepared for new graves.

Some headstones had been preserved after submissions from families.

He refused to give details of the reasons for the other graves being preserved, except that they were considered to be significant for historical or architectural reasons.

"I cannot – it is a very subjective analysis we have to make," Mr James said.

He said the details were contained in cemetery records and were confidential.

Mr James said although Ms Allchurch had provided extracts from The Cyclopaedia of Western Australia, the article referred to the husband of one of the women in the grave.

"If he had been in the grave that monument definitely would have been retained on the grave.

"She, being the wife, was a relative of an historic person."

Mr James said the headstone from Ms Allchurch's family grave had been moved to the edge of a section being renewed.