



Oh, Charlie!

In March 1883, the Trustees of the St. Kilda Cemetery appointed a secretary-manager, a position which would allow them to delegate day-to-day managerial decisions. How a person with a background as an art furniture dealer, theatrical clothing designer and choirmaster came to manage a major Melbourne cemetery is one of great mirth. The next twenty years would play out like a soap opera culminating in the secretary-manager's dismissal in disgrace and a board of inquiry appointed to investigate serious charges of criminal misconduct.

The story of Charles St. George Truelove (c1850-1909) goes back to a time when as a boy soprano to the St. George's Chapel choir at Windsor Castle, England. Blessed with an "angelic face and sweet childish voice", young Charles was a personal favourite of Queen Victoria who would often request a private audience. That was until one day, his voice failed. He was then apprenticed to an art furniture dealer in London and around 1880,

Source: Smith, J., "Cyclopedia of Victoria" (1904) Vol II p 208
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Charles Truelove c1903

Truelove was assigned to accompany a consignment of furniture to Australia. That was until the ship sunk off the coast of Africa. Continuing on the journey to Australia minus the load of goods, he found work with the Musgrove Opera Company in the clothing department. Later he

Chas. Truelove

joined the Soldene Comic Opera Company as a designer. That was until he created a sensation by producing costumes for the female performers that were provocatively tight fitting. Still a choirboy at heart, he turned to his first love and achieved some success as a choirmaster organising groups to mark large occasions. That was until he fell on hard times.

And so, the story goes, "some good friend decided that Charlie would make a good manager for a Cemetery". It may be that his position as choirmaster with All Saints' (Anglican) Church, Chapel Street had something to do with his good fortune. Regardless, it was a brave decision by the Trustees to appoint an incumbent of Truelove's ilk with limited business experience at a time when available space for some denominations was scarce and talk of the impending new metropolitan cemetery being established that would affect the future of St. Kilda.

Almost instantly after Truelove's appointment, the cemetery funds increased dramatically. From a balance of just £888 in 1881 a decade later it had reached £6,274. This was the era of the 'land boom' when the rush to be rich brought about spectacular paper profits. From there on it reached a high of £7,179 in 1895 before declining as the Trust carried out capital works, the highest amount spent totalling £2,721 in 1896. So how did Truelove achieve such a dramatic increase? By a combination of branching into grave decoration and maintenance through the establishment of a plant nursery, double selling rights of burials, the re-use of graves to unsuspecting purchasers and converting floral borders, ornamental areas and paths into gravesites. For example, the three floral roundabouts to the west of the cemetery were converted to burials in 1890 and 1894.

Little did the Trustees



One of three floral roundabouts converted for burials in 1890-94

TRUSTEES and TRAFFICKING

On 1 November 1906, **George Alexander Elmslie** (1861-1918; Melbourne General Cemetery), a stonemason by trade and local member for Albert Park (1902-18) rose before the Legislative Assembly to present "a petition that dealt with a very grave subject". *Melbourne Punch* would describe Elmslie as "careful, deliberate, patient and reliable". He was not the type to abuse parliamentary privilege and make unfounded accusations. Elmslie contended that the Trustees of the St. Kilda Cemetery "had sold to themselves land to be used as graves, and they sold it at about one-fifth of the cost that would have been charged to the public" but admitted that they "were not acting for their personal profit". In other words, the Trustees were engaging in the trafficking of graves. Elmslie went on to name the Trustees: Cr. John Maddock (paid £3 for graves worth £13), Cr. Edward O'Donnell (paid £4 for graves worth £24), Cr. John Stedeford (paid £3 for graves worth £12 12s) Thomas Matthews (paid £4 for graves worth £24), Thomas Alston (paid £3 for graves worth £13), Cr. Frederic Hughes (paid £4 for graves worth £24), Cr. F. Race Godfrey (paid £4 for graves worth £24), Florence Gardiner (paid £2 for graves worth £6 6s) and even Cr. Thomas Simmons - first chairman of Springvale Necropolis - bought land for £4 that would have been sold to the public for £24. But the worst offender was Frederick Wimpole, Catholic, Councillor and owner of the landmark *George Hotel* who "had bought land for £10 for which the public would have been charged £75". In fact it was contended that Wimpole owned more than 380 graves. (Source: ADB Vol 8 Cl-Gib (GE); VPD (1905) p 2185; VPD (1906) p2555-56)



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suspect there was anything untoward under Truelove's management. Not just was Truelove able to increase the credit balance, he also introduced the sounds of music to the cemetery by enlisting the gravediggers who responded with zest much to the acclaim of the public. Another inspiration of Truelove's was the establishment of a nursery within the cemetery which he held a share in. The nursery would provide a new source of income to support the maintenance of the cemetery when the new metropolitan cemetery would force its closure. This scheme continued for a few years until mid-1896 when the government opined that the Trustees were acting outside their powers and ordered it be closed. But this didn't stop Truelove from using his share to open "The Sunbeam Nursery" opposite the cemetery on Dandenong Road. By then, Charlie had remarried a widow, **Marie Elizabeth Goode née Broadbent** (1865-1944, Necropolis Springvale) who

Source: Smith, J., "Cyclopedia of Victoria" (1904) Vol II p 209
Image kindly supplied by Shirley & David Joy.



Marie Truelove née Broadbent c 1903

was to bore him two daughters - Kathleen Marie (1897-1982; married Louis Herry, 1920) and Winifred Ida (b 1902; married Louis Hall, 1929). Marie Truelove and the extended Broadbent family were placed in charge of the nursery.

Around the same time that the Trust decided to establish a cemetery nursery, a decision was also made to branch into grave maintenance and decoration in direct competition with monumental masons. The Trust contended that "persons who undertook such work gave scant satisfaction". Besides, they argued, the *Cemeteries Act* empowered Trustees to keep "every grave, vault, monument, cenotaph, wall, fence, or other erection" in proper order. And so a works area in the cemetery grounds was established for this purpose. In 1896, no sooner had the "The Sunbeam Nursery" been established that the company directors felt there was public demand for cement work kerbing. The "Adamant Grave Moulding and Maintenance Company Proprietary Limited" was formed and monumental work added another branch to the existing services of plant supplies and cement kerbing. The local monumental mason

Source: Smith, J., "Cyclopedia of Victoria" (1904) Vol II p 209.
Image kindly supplied by Shirley & David Joy.



Adamant Company, Dandenong Road c1903

Hubert Tope (c1838-1914, CofE "B" 325B) of "Tope & Dear" would provide a written statement to the local member of Albert Park, George Elmslie who in 1905 would state before the Legislative Assembly that the Trustees "did pay for a large amount of materials, such as bricks, cement, paint &c., which was used by the secretary's wife's firm, without their paying for same..." and the Trustees paid the firm "£50 for plants which are still lying at the cemetery, and are not worth 50s".

Not everyone warmed to the Truelove charm and by the late-1890s things began to unravel. Complaints from aggrieved letter writers would find their way in the daily press. In 1895, one writer 'Pro Bono Publico' complained against exorbitant fees which could be reduced if the Trustees had not "thrown away money in lavish expenditure". As another writer asked, "why is all the money spent on the nursery, building hot-houses, fernery, glass houses, wagons, coach houses and manufacturing all kinds of material?".

And then there was the matter of Truelove's long time nemesis and Tope's business partner **Nathaniel Dear** (c1848-1903, Bap "B" 530) of 55 Raglan Street, East St. Kilda. As far back as March 1883, Dear ran foul with the Trustees. This led to a long running saga of antagonism that culminated in an action of libel. In May 1897, Dear sued Truelove alleging slander. The statement which Truelove admitted was "interpreted by Dear to imply that he [Dear] had obtained money by false pretences and had been guilty of fraudulent and improper practices". Dear

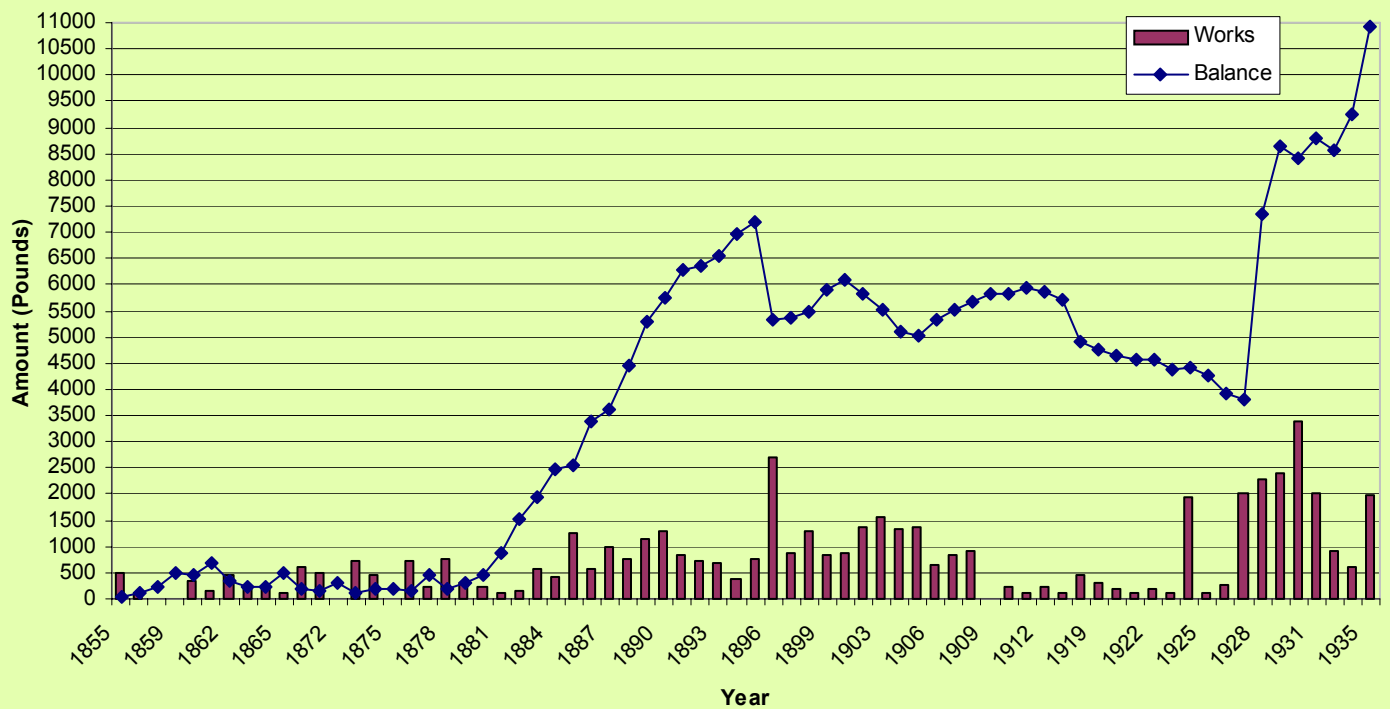


Grave of the Dear family

The Truelove Years...	Truelove appointed secretary-manager	Residents petition closure	Complaints made in press	Balance £7,179	Board of Inquiry sought	Sales continue of gravesites	Trustees investigated	Variation to approve illegal burials
	1881 1883	1883-87	1890	c1893	1895	1896 1897	1899	1901-05
	Balance £888	External brick wall constructed	Plant nursery established	Trust ordered to close nursery	Libel action against Truelove	Discontinuance Order	Truelove dismissed	Board of Inquiry held



Balance v Works - 1855 to 1935



The above graph illustrates the closing balance and the amount of funds expended on capital works for the period 1855 to 1935. One can see quite clearly the spectacular rise of the balance during the Truelove years (1882-1905) followed by the steady decline to 1928 when the discontinuance was varied to allow further interments. (Source: St. Kilda Cemetery Financial Returns compiled from VGG 1855-1935) 🐾

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sought £249 in damages but the Truelove charm continued in the courts, and Dear lost the libel. Tope and Dear were behind a number of deputations calling on a board of inquiry into the cemetery when it was found that Truelove had established "The Sunbeam Company" in questionable circumstances. Dear was also a prolific letter writer to the local St. Kilda Council complaining of overcrowding and unsanitary conditions within the cemetery. Truelove would attack these "unprincipled petty tradesmen...seldom found among educated gentlemen" who gained "cheap advertisements" from the publicity.

When the long-running debate on the location of the new metropolitan cemetery at Springvale was finally settled, the sale of new gravesites was discontinued at St. Kilda Cemetery from 1 January 1901, effectively closing the cemetery. But Truelove was able to get around the provisions. One method was "to issue certificates to employees of the cemetery...for which they paid nothing and then persuade them to transfer said graves to..." Adamant Monumental Co. "for £1, the price of the ground to the public being £6 6s". Another method employed was the issuing of some 1,000 blank rights of burial signed by the Trustees and back dating these. (The Trustees later denied signing blank deeds). To legitimise these burials, a special variation of the

Discontinuance Order was required in 1906 to cover burials up to 15 September 1905, a few days before Truelove made haste and fled to avoid giving evidence at an inquiry ordered by the Trustees. (A warrant was issued for his arrest, but he managed to get away due to a police bungle). And a good thing too. At the official board of inquiry held in November-December 1907 to investigate four specific matters, evidence was heard by David Winbanks, an employee, who stated "several times when digging a new grave, came across coffins and bones" and was told by Truelove to "Throw it out". In 1906, the Member for Albert Park said in Parliament that the Trustees knew "that there were improper practices going on" but refused to investigate allegations "that had since been proved" that Truelove "was selling the graves, and...he was taking bodies out of graves and burning [in the hot-house furnace] the coffins and bones of people who had been interred in them previously". For poor Charlie Truelove, he did eventually return to the cemetery, but this time to rest in peace. He died suddenly at the Alfred Hospital on 1 September 1909 aged 59 and was buried in a grave that appears to have been double sold (OD "C" 15A). (Source: VGG 28 Apr 1899 & 20 Nov 1906; VPD (1905) p2180-81 & (1906) p2556-57; The Argus 11 Sep 1905 p4; 3 Sep 1909 p1; The Herald 12 Nov 1895 p3, 25 Nov 1895 p3, 25 May 1897 p2, 26 May 1897 p1 & 28 May 1897 p4; St. Kilda Chronicle 17 Mar 1882; DHS file on St Kilda Cemetery Part 1 93/387/121 455; St. Kilda Cemetery file held by Port Phillip Council (Letters 7 Feb 1898, 16 May 1898 & 3 Dec 1898); Smith, J., "Cyclopedia of Melbourne" (1904) p208-209; Blaikie, G., "Scandals of Australia's Strange Past" (1963) p36-42) 🐾