



The monument to the Burke & Wills Expedition in the Bendigo Cemetery

Memoirs of the Late Leaders of the Exploring Expedition

The Age (Melbourne, Vic. : 1854 - 1954) Wed 13 Nov 1861 Page 5

The interest felt in these colonies, and especially in Victoria, in all that relates to our gallant but ill-fated explorers, cannot be otherwise than great and general. We are fortunate in being enabled to furnish the public with a brief memoir, which has been carefully compiled from the most reliable sources, of the previous career of the lamented leaders of this, soon to be, world famous expedition.

- Let us raise a monument to the memory of those who have fallen in the cause of this glorious achievement, in the cause of their adopted country. Let it not be dwarfed column or sculptured bust, but a tall tower on some bold headland, a noble column on the mountain's brow, that shall stand a landmark for all ages, and be seen a long day's journey afar, and which generations yet unborn shall point to from the corn-field and vineyard when they tell the tale of our bold explorers, of their triumph, and of their devotion.

This monument commemorates Australian explorers, Burke and Wills and their party who first crossed the Australian continent from south to north in 1861.

The monument was erected mainly through the efforts of Thomas Pope Besnard, a childhood friend of Burke's and sexton of the local Back Creek Cemetery. He pushed to raise the money for a monument through public subscription - everyone was asked to pay a shilling - no person could pay more and therefore nobody could claim to have given more than anybody else.

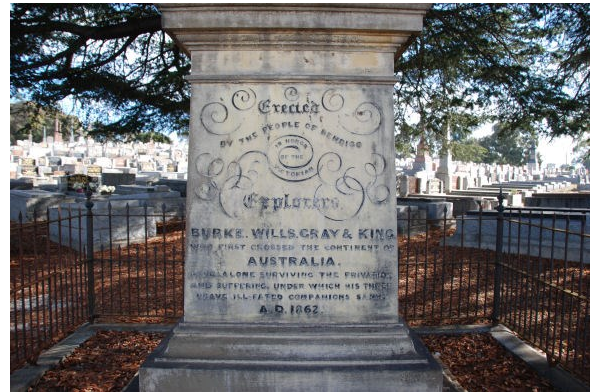
Besnard selected a site for the monument in the cemetery which was on a grass knoll well clear of any other graves. It was to be landscaped and have path and garden beds that provided dignified access. Stawell inspected and approved the

site. The address he gave, along with the diaries of members of the expedition, the Sandhurst Almanac, the Bendigo Advertiser, the Bendigo Independent Evening News, photographs of the deceased, photographs of Public Buildings in Bendigo, a Sydney half sovereign and all the silver coins of the Realm were wrapped in a Union Jack and placed in a niche in the foundation stone.

It was another 15 months before the column was erected on the foundation stone and Besnard openly criticised the Memorial Committee for their lack of action. The Bendigo Advertiser was disappointed at the location of the monument preferring a more central location and in 1893 an attempt was made to have the monument moved to Rosalind Park.

Front Inscription on monument.

Erected by the people of Bendigo
in honour of the Victorian
Explorers
BURKE, WILLS, GRAY AND KING
who first crossed the continent of
Australia.
King alone surviving the privation
and suffering under which his three
brave ill-fated companions sank.
A.D. 1862



Charles Gray: An inscription to him on the 4th side.

CHARLES GRAY
Died also on his return at
Polygonum Swamp
17th April 1861.



Deaths on the Victorian Exploring Expedition

1. **Charles Gray**, Wednesday, 17 April 1861 at Polygonum Swamp.
2. **Charles Stone**, Monday, 22 April 1861 at Koorliatto Waterhole, Bulloo River.

3. **William Purcell**, Tuesday, 23 April 1861 at Koorliatto Waterhole, Bulloo River.
4. **Dr Ludwig Becker**, Monday, 29 April 1861 at Koorliatto Waterhole, Bulloo River.
5. **William Patten**, Wednesday, 5 June 1861 near Desolation Camp, Rat Point.
6. **William John Wills**, the official date of death adopted by the Exploration Committee was Wednesday, 28 June 1861, but Wills probably died around Friday, 30 June or Saturday, 1 July 1861 at Breerily Waterhole, Cooper Creek.
7. **Robert O'Hara Burke**, the official date of death adopted by the Exploration Committee was Wednesday, 28 June 1861, but Burke probably died on Saturday, 1 July 1861 at Burke's Waterhole, Cooper Creek.

EXPLORATION BLUNDERS.

Bendigo Advertiser (Vic. : 1855 - 1918) Thu 7 Nov 1861 Page 2

SANDHURST. THURSDAY, NOV 7, 1861.

It is with no wish to detract from the glory of the gallant exploit of Burke and Wills that we now offer a few remarks upon the expedition which their death has so unfortunately closed.

Their bravery and devotion will be household words as long as Australia is an inhabited country. With a perseverance unsurpassed by even the noble Eyre, they forced their way to their goal that, too, with a thorough knowledge that for all they endured in their advance they would have to suffer fourfold hardships in retracing their weary steps.

With no friendly voice to welcome, no kindly hand to relieve, they reached the north coast already weary, exhausted, and almost provisionless. and the place where succour ought to have awaited the successful travellers, was but the milestone to mark the commencement of their greatest sufferings.

They indulged in but a brief rest, and then, actuated, no doubt, mainly by a desire to relieve the depot party as speedily as possible from their anxious suspense, they chose rather to retrace their old route than to make for Queensland by the well mapped tracks of Gregory and Leichhardt. Painfully they fagged along, and arrived at what they must have almost considered home, only, alas to find that the depot party had abandoned their post on the very day that they had reached it, in the last stage of exhaustion.

Few can conceive their revulsion of feeling, and their sickness of blasted hope, who have not been similarly placed. How much is there not to be found in poor

Wills quiet remark that Brahe "had put us in this fix." All criticism on their future proceedings would be unfair. The sound mind is seldom to be found but in the sound body, and the clearest and most vigorous judgement would be obscured by the sufferings of mind and body which they had endured.

Sadly they struggled, slowly they sank, and manfully they died: peace be with their lonely graves. Their names are enrolled high in that glorious list, already, alas too long, whence shine forth the deeds of Park and Clapperton, of Cook and Laterouse, of Leichardt and Kennedy, of Franklin, Crozier, and Bellot.

The feat of first crossing the continent of Australia has been accomplished by them. We maintain, nevertheless, that it has been consummated with an unnecessary sacrifice. Facts have already given sad proof that there was no necessity for the loss of one single life, excepting poor Gray's, and even that might have been spared.

Seeing that private parties, scantily provided, run over the ground traversed by Wright, with ample equipment, without experiencing any such disastrous results as befell him, we may reasonably infer that his loss of men, was caused either by improper constitutions being admitted, or by his men being called upon to go through needless exertions.

Why the depot party, living quietly alongside of a creek, where fresh fish, birds, and plants were all procurable, and where rats were so numerous as to be a nuisance, should become affected by scurvy we really cannot imagine. Any one will be ready to point out many reasons why they should not.

Again, why that depot party, when it did abandon its post, should appropriate nearly three fourths of the remaining stores, to perform the same journey which their harder worked comrades had to undertake, in an exhausted state, with one third of their provisions, we are at a loss to understand. Still less can we conceive why, on joining Wright, and becoming satisfied of their own safety, they did not take back their superfluous stores, and add them to the meagre supply which they had left for their leader and his companions.

Undoubtedly the Committee, at the outset, perpetrated a great mistake in not providing for the reception of a successful party on the north coast. That, however, is entirely beyond the present subject of inquiry.

The Expedition arrived at Swan Hill with a superfluity of stores, which might have lasted the whole sixteen men composing it for eighteen months. The fatal mistakes commenced at Menindie. The party left that place with only about twenty weeks provisions. Instead of a fatigue party accompanying them to Cooper's Creek, leaving a really useful cache and then returning, the original advance party, was

subdivided without gaining any advantage.

The same stores which Brahe consumed while inert on Cooper's Creek would have been sufficient to carry him across with Burke, thereby adding to the safety of his party. The lamentable consequences of relying on the chance of another party equipping themselves and following their steps within a certain time, only confirms the precept of trusting only in your own eyes in all such cases.

No doubt the original stock of provisions Burke took with him from Menindie was too small, still that may be set on one side, for if properly supported, it would not have been attended with serious results.

The first grand mistake, then, was the want of an accompanying fatigue party.

The second was the mismanagement which permitted the auxiliary parties to become affected with scurvy and, consequently, disabled.

The third and fatal blunder lies at the door of Messrs Brahe and Wright, but more particularly Wright's. Brahe's desertion of the depot was involved in his allowing his men to become attacked by scurvy, while he had abundant means of preventing it. His greedy appropriation of the major part of the provisions is even less defensible, but, after his rejoining Wright, that officer became responsible for his proceedings, and for the repair of his mistakes.

That they should have revisited the depot, not only without replenishing it, but absolutely without satisfying themselves that it had not been disturbed, appears the very climax of thoughtless mismanagement. There is no need of occupying space with figures and dates to prove that the deplorable end of the brave Burke and Wills is to be traced immediately to these blunders.

We write from a careful examination of all the papers yet published, and we believe that the conviction of all who will similarly study these documents, will lead them to agree with us in saying that Messrs Wright and Brahe stand morally indicted with having, through neglect of duty, caused the death of their superior officers, Messrs Burke and Wills.

*A contrary view about whether the remains of the Burke & Will
expedition should be returned to Melbourne.*

Bendigo Advertiser (Vic. : 1855 - 1918) Sat 14 Dec 1861 Page 2
THE BONES OF THE EXPLORERS.

We cannot but think that the Government has been to precipitate in committing the people to a resolution, declaring that the remains of our gallant explorers should be brought down to Melbourne. As a part of the scheme by which it is sought to do

honor to the memory of Burke and his comrades, we hold this to be altogether unnecessary to the occasion. We believe that the whole community are agreed that every possible token of recognition should be given to the services of the brave men who died for the glory of Victoria; and it is a pity that there should be any mistake committed in the realisation of so good an object.

To bring down the bones of Burke and Wills, or of any of their companions, would, however, be a blunder worthy of the Exploration Committee. There is no necessity for any such act to do honor to the memory of the explorers. They had better rest where they lie. They need no grander burying-place - no ground more sacred. The desert, which they conquered, is their most fitting tomb. To disturb their bones would be a useless sacrilege - a public funeral, a vain mockery. There is a consecration already in that bare patch of wild earth, which will be known for ever hereafter as the place where Burke died, which it is not in our power to better by any ceremony.

What honor are we prepared to do the remains of the dead, let it be done over the spot where they lie - the scene of their labors' end and their relief - the terminus of the Victorian Exploration. Could Burke have foreseen his fate, there can be little doubt that such would have been his own wish. To "vex the unhappy dust they would not save" is the appropriate part of the Exploration Committee. It ought to be sufficient that they have destroyed the explorers, without desiring to disturb their bones. To cap all their catalogue of blunders, it was only needed that they should endeavour to couple with the names of Burke and Wills, every small name which happened to have been included in the Expedition.

It is only by a narrow chance that we have escaped including Gray among the heroes of the Exploration, and giving to his remains the same honour as that which we would render to Burke himself. We cannot trust the committee any further in this matter, and as the best means of avoiding their unhappy services, as well as the most rational and appropriate mode of doing honour to the remains of our explorers, it is better that they should be left to lie where they are, leaving to posterity some mark by which it may recognise the fate and honour the memories of the dead. What is now a desert may then be the centre of a populous and cultivated country.

The tombs of Burke and Wills may then be in the midst of fruitful pastures and of smiling cornfields, and they will acquire a peculiar interest from being exactly on the spot where our heroes perished. And it is surely more fitting that these memorials should stand among the people and the scenes created mainly by the labors of the dead, than they should have a place in some Melbourne cemetery. If the people of Melbourne are desirous of paying their tribute to the memory of Burke and Wills, they can do so quite as gracefully through the erection of a monument in some public place, which it is not necessary should be a tombstone.

In this manner, by leaving the remains of the explorers to rest where they are, in the place where they died and were buried, and by contenting ourselves with a public memorial in such shape as would do honour both to the men we celebrate and to ourselves, we would best discharge the duty we owe to those who have done so much and perished so sadly.

[This is not the first time that the Argus has made capital out of our suggestions. - ED. B.A.]



Compiled by Pat & Ian Belmont
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