



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

## **John KING**

***Bendigo Advertiser (Vic. : 1855 - 1918) Thu 18 Jan 1872 Page 2***

The Funeral of John King. - The remains of King, the survivor of the Burke and Wills party, which crossed the continent, were conveyed to their final resting place yesterday. The Herald says:- The funeral of the late Mr John King, sole survivor of the ill-fated exploring expedition of 1862, took place yesterday afternoon, and was followed by a large number of mourners. The coffin, which was covered with black cloth, was massively mounted, and upon the engraved plate was the following simple inscription:- "John King, died 15th January, 1872, aged thirty one years."

The place of interment was the Melbourne General Cemetery. The funeral service was read by the Rev Mr Bickford.

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***Bendigo Advertiser (Vic. : 1855 - 1918) Wed 17 Jan 1872 Page 2 THE BENDIGO ADVERTISER.***

SANDHURST, WEDNESDAY, JAN 17, 1872.

THE END OF A SAD TALE

With the death of John King the last chapter in the history of that most unfortunate expedition of exploration, conducted by Robert O'Hara Burke, is brought to a conclusion. As far as that expedition was a success, the praise is due to Mr Burke for his dashing bravery, which fitted him rather for subordinate than for leading duties. His qualities were such that as a military officer he would have led his command up to the cannon's mouth with eager impetuosity and undaunted courage; but he lacked the calmness and consideration which are essential in the general. His run across the continent was a brilliant exploit, the success of which was marred by his want of coolness and thoughtfulness, and he paid the penalty of his precipitance, miserably, with his life.

As far, however, as his expedition was a failure, the blame is attributable rather to those who placed him in a position unsuitable to his abilities, than to himself. He did his best and succeeded in effecting what he understood he had been sent out to accomplish. Nevertheless it must for ever be regretted that, he was so hotly impulsive, and obstinately wayward. Had he listened to the advice of his soberer and more experienced colleague, Mr Wills, there can be no doubt his little party would have reached his headquarters on the Darling in safety. But unfortunately, in receiving his instructions, he had been told that he could, with little difficulty, reach some of the South Australian stock stations from Cooper's Creek.

In acting on this hint, he turned his back on the easy means of escape which was open to him. This was his own resolution, formed in opposition to the wishes and opinions of his two companions. Had he yielded to them, the probabilities are that all three would have been still alive. It was his forced and lonely imprisonment, without hope of deliverance, in an inhospitable and desert region that preyed on King's mind, and fatally ruined his constitution. There was one gallant young fellow in that expedition, who, if he has not been very harshly dealt by, has, at all events received but scant public justice. King himself, before the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the causes of the deaths of Burke and Wills, exonerated Mr W Brahe from the blame which had been cast upon him by the public and the press.

It is true that, in his journey from Cooper's Creek to the Darling, King told Mr Howitt that he attributed the loss of those gentlemen to Brahe's desertion of the depot. But it must be remembered that at that time King was in a very weak state, both of body and mind. He had long been brooding in solitude over the terrible scenes in which his leaders had perished, and could only see that the immediate cause of these disasters, and of his own imminent danger of death or of exclusion from the world for life, had been the departure of the depot party under Brahe from Cooper's Creek.

He was not then aware of the nature of the instructions which had been given by Mr Burke to Brahe, which the latter had not only fulfilled, but actually exceeded, by remaining at his post for a much longer time than he had been ordered to do. Certain it is, at any rate, that King on recovering his health and composure and after having calmly reviewed, all the circumstances of the case, altered his views altogether with regard to the conduct of Brahe, and deliberately and unhesitatingly stated to the Commissioners his firm belief that Brahe done his duty, and remained at the depot as long as it was in his power to do so. Let it be always remembered, in justice to this much abused young man, that he had duties to discharge towards the men and animals under his command.

Mr Burke had told him that if he did not return in three months to the depot, he might rely upon it that he had either perished or had made for the settled districts

of Queensland, and at the expiration of that period he was to withdraw his party to the Darling. But Brahe, hoping against hope, lingered on from day to day for another month.

By that time, scurvy had broken out among his men and one of them, Patten, the blacksmith, had received a kick from a horse which he believed would be attended with fatal consequences unless he soon obtained medical assistance, and therefore earnestly besought Brahe to commence his retreat towards the Darling.

Importuned in this manner, aware that his horses and camels were starving in consequence of the grassless condition of the country in his immediate neighbourhood, and fully believing that Mr Burke had adopted the course, he had mentioned to him as probable of making for Queensland, he reluctantly made arrangements for his departure, taking the precaution, however, of leaving a considerable supply of food and some clothing in a cache at the depot. Strangely and singularly enough, the very day of his departure from the depot was that of the arrival of Burke at the same spot. It was late in the day before Brahe's little cavalcade moved off in the direction of Bulloo.

A camel had been missing, and the day was so far advanced before it was found, that Brahe was within an ace of postponing his departure until the next morning. But this, it would seem, was not to be. A start was effected in the afternoon, and in the evening Burke with Wills and King rode up to the abandoned depot. That night the two parties were encamped only fourteen miles apart. By some extraordinary fatality, Mr Burke determined on shaping his course for Mount Hopeless - ominous name - and the fearful consequences are well known.

On the occasion of the death of the last of those three hapless men, who, with succour so near at hand, rode off to destruction, it seems only fair to say a word in defence of him, at whose door their sufferings and the death of two of them have been unjustly and frequently laid. We would call attention to the fact that the course pursued by Mr Brahe has a notable precedent in that adopted by Mr Brown, the second in command of the expedition into the interior under Capt Sturt. The chief, on departing with the since celebrated Robert Macdougall Stuart and a small party on his last journey into the Stony Desert, left Mr Brown in charge of the encampment at the Depot Glen in the Grey Ranges, with instructions to fall back at his discretion towards the Darling.

This Mr Brown found it necessary to do, and Sturt and Stuart, to their great dismay, on their return from their miserable trip, worn out with fatigue and disappointment, found the depot deserted. But Captain Sturt, a leader totally different in every respect, except in his indomitable courage, from Mr Burke, followed up the retreating party, rejoined them in safety, and thanked Mr Brown for the judicious step he had taken. Doubtless if Mr Burke had followed Brahe, and

overtaken him as he undoubtedly would have done, he would, in the same manner, have acknowledged the propriety and prudence of his conduct. If King in his last hours spoke of Brahe, we do not believe he can have alluded to him in terms of censure or reproach.



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Compiled by Pat & Ian Belmont  
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