



Outback Grave Markers
Trevor Tough 0418 957 207 Alex Aitken 0417 176 275
www.outbackgraves.org – PO Box 310 Muchea WA 6501



Report of the 2018 Regional Heritage Conference

Geraldton 12-13 April 2018

Outback Grave Markers were invited to present at this Conference by the organiser, Callum Crofton, Department of Lands and Heritage, as a result of a meeting held with the Department in 2017.

Trevor Tough, co-founder of Outback Grave Markers (OGM), prepared a presentation to be delivered in the 25 minute slot that had been allocated to us on the Friday morning, but unfortunately owing to a health issue he was unable to attend the conference and Alex delivered the presentation to the conference.

The Conference was built around “Scared Heritage” and had presenters from a wide range of backgrounds including Religious Orders, Indigenous Heritage, National Trust, Mid-West Heritage and Funding Bodies. A number of the presentations were based on the preservation of Burial Sites and the need to preserve these in both large and small, as well as individual, burial sites.

Day 1

Richard Offen, former head of Heritage Perth, was the MC for the program and introduced the Elders of the area for the Welcome to Country which included a didgeridoo performance by a young student.

The official welcome from the Mayor of the City of Geraldton was brief and the conference was then under way.

Father John Herbert, Abbott of New Norcia.

The presentation by Fr John set the tone for the conference in that it was honest and open with no pretence that things did not go wrong in the long history of the establishment. The journey of the Community from start to present has always had a connection with the Aboriginal community and at times this has had some issues when Government edicts and societal attitudes led to some less than perfect incidents.

The fact that there was no abject apology from Fr John, just a factual admission, and that assistance in coming to grips with any of the legacy from these occurrences was on offer to any and all who may have suffered, was very refreshing.

He went on to detail the transition of the Community from Monastic rigidity to a self-sustaining Monastic Tourism Hub. It was a lesson in adaptation and innovation that was supported by offering the wider Community an opportunity to access some of the Heritage Treasures of the Monastery as well as an opportunity to learn about the growth and heritage of the State.

Fr John provided some guidance in framing applications for funding from the various sources available, such as the National Trust, Heritage WA and Lotterywest.

Partick Churnside - Member of the Aboriginal Cultural Materials Committee

Patrick, a Traditional Owner from the Pilbara, was appointed to the APMC by the Minister and is a self-made man having grown up in Roebourne and Karratha, moving to Tom Price to work in the mines, before being drawn back to "Country" as his feelings for the preservation of Heritage grew.

Patrick's presentation was very much about understanding and communication and the need for communication between all groups and within groups as he recognised that there was not always harmony between traditional owners within the same tribal group.

Once again, the tone of the presentation was one of willingness to learn from sharing knowledge, having the courage to face the unknown without fear of prejudice and the courage to accept that not all is known about the Heritage of which the current generations are the Custodians.

Rev Dr Paul O'Donnell

As the conference was entitled Sacred Heritage, there were many references to Religious Heritage that may have seemed out of place with the OGM's project, but this was not the case.

The presentation made by Dr O'Donnell was in regard to the "Intangible Cultural Heritage", which is directly related to the work of OGM. The fact that the stories being researched and published are part of the "Intangible Heritage", is very true and needs to be recognised as part of the fabric of the Western Australian Heritage whether they were of black, white, Asian or Afghan culture.

The message here was that the "Intangible" is as important as the physical heritage.

Ian Hamilton – Regenerating Places of Faith

Ian is an expert in the assessing and restoration planning of physical religious sites such as churches and church buildings but has a wider view on the ways of re purposing as well as restoring these places so they are more Community focused.

The fact that religious communities are declining, has led to the need to find innovative ways of sustaining the buildings that were, in the early days, the focus of the community and are now, in many cases, an eyesore and a drag on the community and national purses.

Kelly Rippingale – National Trust of WA

Kelly presented on the Revitalisation of the Greenough Flats and the issues faced by the National Trust in being able to maintain the Trust's assets, not just in this area, but across the board.

This presentation highlighted the issue of having a huge portfolio of property but not the budget or staffing to maintain these, let alone restore them.

The lesson learned from this is to be very sure when planning for the future that the passion for the project does not outweigh the ability to physically and financially support the activities to be undertaken. The case in point for OGM would be the Leonora, Halls Creek and Coolgardie Shire requests.

Afternoon workshop

Alex: At the conclusion of the day's set programme, I chose to participate in the non-religious workshop which included presentations by National Trust, Traditional Owners and local Greenough historians who are determined to tell the stories of the past in the language of the day and to publish the buried facts that were not palatable in days gone by. Speakers at this workshop were:

Lisa Sturis and Karl Haynes spoke of the role of the National Trust Heritage Appeals. This highlighted the ability of community groups to be able to take advantage of the Trust's ability to

confer the Deductible Gift Recipients status on groups to enable donations to the group to gain Tax Deductible status!!!

This is a reasonably complex process but may well be worth looking at in the future as the organisation retains all the control of the fund raising whilst the Trust maintains the banking account and disperses monies as requested and verified by accounts.

Alex: Food for thought if OGM is to seek Corporate support!!!

Godfrey Simpson spoke on song lines and traditional owners heritage and intangible heritage. Speaking with Godfrey after his presentation he was appreciative of the approach taken by OGM and after the OGM presentation he understood better the relationship between OGM and traditional owners and the way OGM presents the facts.

Gary Martin is another local with the same passion as OGM has in recording, researching and publishing the history of an area and to dig out the history which has been sanitised and buried by those who controlled the distribution of information in the past. His aim is always to memorialise the places and people for future generations to reflect upon.

Day 2

Hélène Bartleson – Mapping the Spiritual Heritage of Christmas Island

This was a fascinating and beautifully presented case study of the preservation and restoration of the cemeteries on the Island and the involvement of the Shire of Christmas Island in the project.

It was a huge task and was only made possible by the LGA being 100% behind the project. It entailed taking on the Commonwealth Government and vested interests to save what are now the only known Chinese Traditional Cemeteries to exist in the world.

Alex: The former CEO of the council, Kelvin Matthews, is now the CEO of Mount Magnet Shire and I was able to speak to him and a councillor Karen Morrissey with regard to the possible discovery of an old graveyard at the old Lennonville site.

Karen Morrissey, in conjunction with Lorna Day, wrote a book “ Drawn to Mt Magnet” a history of the area. Karen is keen to work with OGM on the possible Lennonville site as she has always believed there was something wrong with the known site having so few graves in it, being as the town had a peak of 2,000 folk and there are only 7 graves at the known site.

Alex: A challenge for us all.

Aidan Ash – Department of Planning and Heritage

Aidan presented an overview of the Legislation as it applies to Cultural Heritage from an Aboriginal Heritage Act perspective which OGM is aware of from members’ work in the Oil & Gas and Mining Industry. This was an information awareness session for those involved in Major restoration projects and Shires.

Tarun Preet Singh – Sikh Heritage in WA

Tarun gave an insight into the Sikh movement in WA and the fact that their cultural practice of Cremation brought about the introduction of the Cremation laws in WA. They are now in the process of establishing a Heritage Park at the major site of the Sikh cremations with the support of Heritage WA and Lotterywest.

Outback Grave Markers – Alex and Trevor

Alex: Trevor was unfortunately unable to attend and I offered his apology and the gathering wished him well and a speedy recovery.

Trevor had prepared a presentation around the guidelines suggested by Callum. However, as the previous presentations had put a different slant on our expectations of the conference, I used this as a base for the presentation.

The fact that the majority of previous presenters had been brutally honest in their approach and had been at pains to make sure that they were not trying to alter history when doing the projects they were involved in, made our work and approach far more relevant.

I spoke about the way we started and the aims that Trevor and I first set out with the emphasis on "telling it as it was recorded in the language of the day", and the fact that what had started as a bit of a hobby with a dream to encourage others to do the same, had now grown into an all-consuming adventure.

In the presentation Trevor had prepared, reference was made to the assistance from all the volunteers, and in particular to TrackCare, for supporting OGM as a sub-committee. Also to the participation of the 4x4 community and the progress made as OGM now heads toward Incorporation.

In the light of the atmosphere at the conference, I spoke of our learning process and how we now have some protocols and rules drafted to ensure the published information is as accurate as possible, and that with the assistance of the professional expertise of Lorraine and Cherie, we will move forward in a well organised and professional manner.

It was stressed that to date, OGM is self-funded. However, now that an approach has been made by LGAs to assist with the identification and marking of grave sites, we are moving toward Incorporation. This will enable OGM to be accepted as a legitimate Group with a Constitution and Rules that will enable the Group to deal with LGAs and other Government and Non-Government bodies on a more sound Governance level.

Mentioning the work of OGM so far, and the learnings from it, it was explained that the Group will now be completing the research prior to engraving and placing the plaques. All information gathered will be published on the website as there are sure to be some conflicting pieces of documentation with dates and names quite often varying from source to source.

Our interaction with all ethnic groups and Aboriginal communities was one of the areas covered. Trevor's relationship with Sam Lovell and others was used as an example of the fact that we respect the feelings and heritage values of all and will work with all people to make sure they are comfortable with the result of our work.

The support we have received from the ABC by way of exposure on Australia Wide and other radio and TV programs, was mentioned and the delegates were encouraged to visit the website, watch the videos, read the stories from Mark and the research as it is published.

Tribute was paid to Yvonne and Kevin Coate for the permission to use their research and publications with no limits and to the Landholders, Station Managers and staff for their participation and fantastic hospitality and support.

I closed with what ended up being a fairly emotional trip down memory lane with regard to our first trip to Old Liveringa Station and the ABC's young cameraman who was spotted kneeling at the grave site we had just marked and was placing on it a little flower he had picked from nearby. This not only had me struggling but brought tears to the eyes of many in the audience as it showed the depth of feeling that is generated by our small contribution to preserving the Heritage of our state and country.

Thanks to Trevor and our volunteers for the support and opportunity to be involved in this conference.

Lee Grmas and Linda Pomare – LotteryWest Grants

What I had been waiting for all day!!! The ladies outlined the policy and procedures of the organisation and the fact that they have Regional Officers who look after particular areas of the state.

Linda gave the overall outline and new interpretation of the Act governing the grant procedure and it was obvious that there was a somewhat more targeted approach being taken to the interpretation of the Act as far as religious organisations were concerned, which caused a few ripples amongst the clergy present.

Lee, the Midwest area representative, started out by saying, "We need to talk to Outback Graves as we need to assist them in their project".

Alex: The rest of the presentation was somewhat lost on me after that remark! It involved planning and application of the rules surrounding grant applications and the assistance available from Lotterywest to organisations.

Dr Fiona Nash – Stained Glass of Geraldton's Cathedrals

Fiona took the Conference on a journey through the windows manufactured by local glass makers based in Greenmount and the meanings of all the windows. This was an interesting look at a lost art in WA.

Summary

Alex: The conference was a great opportunity to showcase the work of OGM and to gain support across the Historical and Heritage networks at work in the state as well as making contact with possible funding sources.

The number of people who came up to me after the presentation and were amazed at the work we were doing was most gratifying and a great testament to the work done by all involved in this adventure.

The discussions with LGAs, Lotterywest and others regarding possible funding and support, will be of great assistance as we move forward with our plans to incorporate and move to a more formal footing for the organisation.

I am to confirm an appointment to confirm with Linda Pomare, of Lotterywest, who wants to make sure we are directed to the most appropriate area for application for funding. As OGM crosses over so many different and geographical areas, it is necessary to tailor the application criteria to suit and to ensure we have the greatest opportunity to secure funding.

In my discussions with Linda and Lee, I mentioned that we were talking with the Shires of Leonora and Halls Creek about the possibility of them paying approximately \$65.00 for each plaque they commission and the Lotterywest ladies were over the moon with that line of thinking. They are unable to make grants just for the running expenses of an organisation, but when the organisation is taking steps to look after its own running costs, it is considered as a positive when making grant applications.

A most worthwhile exercise to attend this conference.

Alex