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## **NATIVE GRAVES, WENTWORTH 1863**

RUSHEEN CRAIG January 2012.

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Illustrated Melbourne Post, 25 July 1863; see page 10.

Wood etching by Samuel Calvert.

Calvert's depiction of the Natives' Graves at Wentworth can be viewed online under the heading: "Natives' [i.e. Aboriginal Australians'] graves, Wentworth." on [this link](#):

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/167543605?q=Wentworth+AND+%22Graves%22&c=picture&versionId=182603759>

The article that accompanied this etching appeared on page 10 of the same edition of the same paper (which is not online).

### **PAGE 10 NATIVE GRAVES.**

*The natives inhabiting the continent of Australia have various modes of burying their dead. In some districts they wrap the bodies in bark cots, and hang them to the trees; Major Mitchell, in the expeditions at the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee, some years ago, thus describes a native tomb. "On a corner of a place, just as we approached the land of reedy hollows, I perceived a large lonely hut, of a peculiar construction, and rode to examine it. On approaching it, I observed it closed on one side, the materials consisting of poles and large sheets of bark, stood in the centre plot of bare earth of a great extent, but enclosed by three small ridges, the surface within the area having been made very level and smooth. I had little doubt that this was a tomb, but, on looking awhile, I perceived that the floor was covered with a bed of rushes, which had been recently occupied; on removing the rushes I ascertained, on thrusting my sabre into the low loose earth under them, that this had covered a grave."*

*Captain Grey describes a native burial where the men piled boughs on the body, and half-filled the grave with them, after which they erected a covering with cross pieces of wood of considerable size, fixed on opposite sides with green boughs placed on them. The custom of residing amongst the graves is found among the natives of all the known portions of Australia, and the object of this strange proceeding is the revelation what individual caused the death of the deceased, either by actual vision or by dream.*

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The two blocks on the NE corner of Berkeley and Alice Streets in Wentworth, Allotments 1 & 2 of Section 7, were **NOT OFFERED FOR SALE in the 1860 first Town Land Sale.. WHY??**

**In Adam's 1858 Plan for the Town of Wentworth, at the top of Allot 1 there is marked a lone Grave;** the word 'Grave' appears next to it (on Allot 2).

By the next year the **1859 Design for the Town of Wentworth shows** that there are now **THREE GRAVES**. The exact size and location of the graves is shown. The three graves start at the northern part of **Allotment 1** (i.e. the northern part of the block on the north-east corner of Berkeley Street and Cadell Street. They come about halfway down the block, the third grave coming over onto what became **Allotment 2** (to the east of Allotment 1). These are very large graves - much, much bigger than the graves shown in what became the Roman Catholic area, or in what became the official Wentworth Cemetery. They are approximately 15 feet by 15 feet each.

Out of respect for the dead, Allots 1 & 2 appear **on the 1859 Plan as 'Temporary Common'**.

**On the later 1900 Plan** there is the additional information - **Notified 24 Dec 18[ ] as a Reserve.**

**Could these be the Natives' Graves at Wentworth shown in the wood etching and written about in the Illustrated Melbourne Post of 1863??** [See Natives' Graves, Wentworth 1863.]

I presume that the reason the land had been designated as a "Temporary Common / Reserve" was forgotten and the land was later sold for **residential use.**

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**BLANDOWSKI'S IMPRESSION OF THE NATIVES OF THE LODDON, THE MURRUMBIDGEE / MURRAY, AND THE DARLING REGIONS 1857.**

... Blandowski next touches on the aborigines, about whom he has collected many interesting particulars, but has not yet had time to put his memoranda into form.

He describes the **Loddon tribe**, or Gunboars, to be an athletic race, and though very wild, and disposed to resist the efforts of the settlers to bring them within the pale of civilization, are yet fast falling victims to imported vices. Nearly all of them are possessed of firearms. They live principally on *yypha* or *calamiter roots*, which they bake.

In January they collect in large numbers to enjoy the fishing season on the Murray, and are very expert in the capture of its finny inhabitants. Sham fights are their principal amusement, but in February they engage with the neighbouring tribes in actual warfare, and have many severe engagements. Their burial grounds are of an extended oblong, like their shields, and are arranged in groups covering from one hundred to one hundred and twenty yards of ground. At Swan Hill, Mr. Blandowski describes having seen a native of gigantic proportions.

The fisher tribes in the neighbourhood of the **Murrumbidgee and Murray** are distinguished by great scars or gashes on their backs, which are inflicted upon themselves by burning sticks. This ceremony they perform on losing a relative. **Near the junction of the Darling** the women make large gashes in their thighs, breasts and arms, and the men inflict severe wounds on their head with tomahawks.

**The graves are huts** covered with the *manur hets* of the dead in which the *currinckles* have to sleep at nights. The female relatives enter the tombs every morning before daybreak, to give expression to their grief. On the Darling they pile upon the top of the grave a large heap of wood, light a fire in front, and cry bitterly. On leaving, the widow plants a green bough on the grave.

At **Goolwa**, M. Blandowski describes having seen a native smoked and roasted after death on a scaffold. The ceremony was accompanied with many fantastic ceremonies.

M. Blandowski concludes his interesting relation by **lamenting the rapid extermination of the tribes occupying the Lower Murray**. Even now he states that the region is all but depopulated, and that a

quietude now reigns there which is saddening to the traveller, who a few years ago found them fully populated.

Empire (Sydney), 13 Oct 1857, p.6.

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