

Thomson's Grave.

A few years ago a group of the Friends toured the Graves of Benefactors and Curators of the Gardens in the Old Cemetery. It was apparent that the graves of Stoddart and Thomson, both Scottish immigrants and bachelors, were in need of restoration. At that time also perusal of documents at the Public Records Office of Victoria in Ballarat by members of the History Group of the Friends revealed correspondence between Noble Wilson, executor of Thomson's estate (which included the donation of the statues in the statuary house and Wallace), suggesting the transfer of a sum of 10 Pounds from the Estate to the Council which, invested at 5 % per annum, would provide a sum of 10/- a year. This would provide enough money to employ a man to clean up the grave yearly. There is no doubt that this happened but over the intervening period of nigh on 100 years the practice had obviously lapsed.

Following investigation by Jenny Burrell in association with Susan Fayad as to what needed to be done to restore the grave It is to the credit of the Council that it has renewed the responsibility entrusted to it so long ago to enable us to meet here this afternoon to celebrate this man's life and the restoration of his resting place.

THE GRAVE OF J. RUSSELL THOMSON.

13th August 1891.

Letter to the Mayor from Noble Wilson and Nevett, Trustees of the Estate of J. Russell Thomson

Dear Sir.

Our Trust in the Estate of Mr J. Russell Thomson will now be completed if you and the members of the City Council will consent to take charge of Mr. Thomson's grave in the Old Cemetery. The grave is covered with a marble slab which requires to be cleaned about once a year and the iron railing on the stone kerb will require a coat of paint also once a year. We think one of the men employed by the Council can do what is required to keep the grave in neat order by giving one day's labor to it yearly. To provide the wages for this man we propose to pay to your Council the sum of 10 Pounds out of the fund of the Estate. If you would hold this sum as a trust and allow 5 % interest upon it, the annual income will be 10/-, and by permitting this sum to be provided in your annual Estimate it will remind you and your successors for all time of their duty to the memory of a man who has nobly enriched this City and left an example to us all. When you have considered this request we will be glad to hear from you.

We remain etc.

J. Noble Wilson F.V.Nevett
Trustees in J.R.Thomson's Estate.

The Trustees would have been pleased to receive the following response from the Council :-

19th August 1891

To J. Noble Wilson
From Vincent Duthie, Acting Town Clerk.

Dear Sir.

I have the honor to acknowledge yours of the 13 th inst. and, in reply, to inform you that the City Council accede to your request and will take charge of the late Mr Thomson's grave in the Old Cemetery.

And in reply :-

20th. August 1891

From Ballarat Trustees, Executors and Agency Co. Ltd.
To Acting Town Clerk.

Dear Sir

I beg to acknowledge receipt of yours of the 19th.inst in which you state that the City Council has "acceded " to the request of the Trustees of Mr J.R.Thomson's Estate to take charge if the grave of Mr J.R.Thomson in the Old Cemetery in terms of the letter of the Trustees dated 13th inst.and I now have pleasure to send you a cheque for 10 Pounds in furtherance of the object in view.

Yours faithfully.

J.Noble Wilson

It would seem that the next Mayor took the responsibility seriously as he apparently forwarded a request to the Ballarat General Cemetery that the grave of J. Russell Thomson be dressed with flowers during the season, only to receive the following discouraging reply :-

April 1894

Letter from the Secretary of the Ballarat General Cemetery
to The Town Clerk :-

...indicating that a request for the grave of J. Russell Thomson be dressed with flowers during the season by the Mayor to be referred for approval by the Trustees, Noble Wilson and Nevett, and that it would be awkward for the Trustees *(presumably Cemetery Trustees ? jg) to specialise (!jg) in such a manner.

VPRS 8118 Unit 11 Vol 2 Document, letter dated 29/07/1909 from Mr Williams (Town Clerk) to Messrs McDonald and Son, Crewick Road indicates continued responsibility by Council in the maintenance of the grave.:- " Please have the memorial and kerbing cleaned, iron rail painted, lettering rebuilt, marble vase refixed and marble flag cleaned as set out in your letter,"

No further correspondence has been found by the History Group to indicate that the Council has resiled from its responsibility.