

Thomas Stoddart 1828-1905



On the 9th March 2010 a piper led people to the rotunda in the Ballarat Old Cemetery. At the invitation of the Friends of Ballarat Botanical Gardens spectators gathered in the morning mist to witness the unveiling of the refurbished grave of the donor of Ballarat's first statues, Thomas Stoddart.

*At left: Thomas Stoddart
At right: Rotunda in the Ballarat Old Cemetery*



The man who is laid to rest in this grave died on the 20 Feb 1905 (105 yrs ago). Shortly before he died he had taken a holiday trip to Queenscliff where he then went for a jaunt across the water to Sorrento. On the return journey Stoddart was so severely affected by a cool change in the weather that he soon became ill and did not recover. In his final days he was largely kept alive by stimulants. We are left to imagine what these might have been. That was what was reported in the newspaper but his death certificate, which we recently obtained, shows that he had suffered from cancer of the liver for three months and that was his cause of death.



Stoddart grave before restoration

He died at 5 o'clock in the morning at the home of his business partner Mr T M Antcliffe at 321 Sturt Street (Myer block) and the news of his death spread quickly. That day flags were flown at half mast on the City Hall, the Mining Exchange and the Art Gallery as well as on clubs, businesses and private buildings. Unusually the Ballarat Stock Exchange was adjourned for the most part of the day and for his funeral as a mark of great respect for one who was held in such high esteem by his fellows.

It was Thomas Stoddart who had suggested the move from Sturt Street to where the Mining Exchange is today. It was fitting that he laid the foundation stone for that building and his large stockbroking business, Stoddart & Binnie, immediately occupied the upstairs rooms facing Lydiard Street North. It is well documented that he floated more gold mining companies than any other Ballarat man. He financed and directed many of them to great success. Generally speaking he was involved with the largest and most successful mines. This made him a wealthy man and it also made Ballarat a prosperous city.

At the Art Gallery they were remembering the man who was a member of their founding committee in 1884 and one who lobbied the colonial government for funds for the building of the Ballarat Fine Art Public Gallery which opened in 1890. Stoddart was also a founding member of the Ballarat Philharmonic Society formed in 1858. We also know that he supported sporting clubs (Central Bowling Club and Wendouree Lawn Tennis Club) and the Welsh Presbyterian Church.