

## 1. Cemetery History

### Early cemeteries

Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, funerals usually took place in churchyards and private burial grounds, but increasing populations and maintenance costs resulted in town and city authorities taking responsibility for them. The first public cemetery in England was licensed in Norwich in 1819, and a shift in responsibility for cemeteries was underscored by the *Colonial Act* of 1821, which directed that no burials could take place in churchyards or the limits of a town. New burial grounds had to be established at least one mile from those town limits.

The fledgling frontier township of Brisbane established a public cemetery at Paddington in 1843. Prior to this, a burial ground for soldiers and convicts had existed near what is now North Quay since the 1820s, and a free cemetery had been established by German missionaries at Nundah in 1838.

### South Brisbane

A public cemetery for South Brisbane was first surveyed in 1843, on the site of the current West End State School, but by the 1860s it had been used only once. During this time, most South Brisbane bodies were ferried across the river at Toowong to be interred at the Paddington cemetery.

By the early 1860s, however, it was becoming increasingly apparent to the residents of the expanding township of South Brisbane that a more conveniently-located cemetery was needed. This prompted a letter to the Lands and Works Department. The letter is dated 26 March 1864 and was signed by eighteen notable Kangaroo Point residents, including William Thornton, James Warner, Silvester Diggles, Joseph Darragh, J.R. Moffatt and J. Mackenzie Shaw:

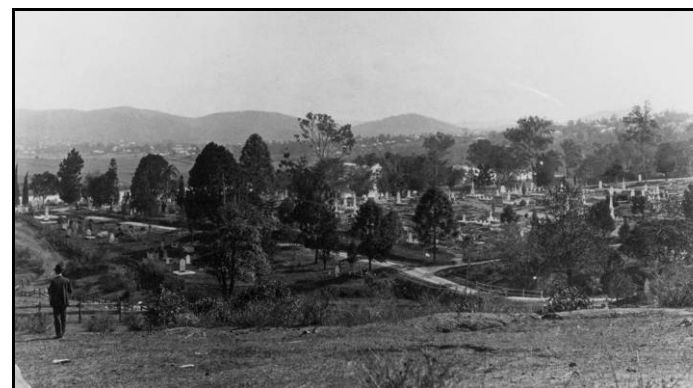
“It has long been felt a very great inconvenience here, more especially for the poorer classes to be obliged to have all their funerals conducted to the burial ground on the north side of the river”

The Surveyor General's Office responded and stated that a portion of land had been already set apart for general cemetery purposes in

1864. This was located on the northern side of Cornwall Street and is sometimes referred to as the 'Old Cemetery' section of the modern South Brisbane Cemetery.

The *Cemetery Act* of 1865 provided for the government to set up cemeteries under the control of trustees. The rules and regulations as set aside by the trustees of the South Brisbane Cemetery appeared in the *Queensland Government Gazette* in November 1866. The first recorded burial at the cemetery took place on 1 August 1870, but it has been rumoured that several burials of Aboriginals occurred prior this date. Gravesites could initially be chosen from any part of the South Brisbane cemetery and there were no separate portions for different religions, unlike at the Paddington cemetery and the newer Brisbane General Cemetery, which was established at Toowong during the 1870s.

The original cemetery extended from Boggo Road (now Annerley Road) and right down to the riverbank, including the Oven's Head outcrop. The lower areas of the cemetery were swampy and bridges linked some of the portions. None of these bridges exist today. Portion 6B, where executed prisoners were buried, was once a part of the low-lying swampy area. The slopes of the new cemetery, however, provided better drainage than at the existing Paddington burial ground, which was on relatively flat ground and became waterlogged in wet weather, leading to health and pollution concerns.



This is a view of the South Brisbane Cemetery (ca. 1880) looking towards the river. One of the bridges can be seen on the right.  
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