

1. Arthur Thomas Peirson (1867-1933)

Grave no. 3B 122D

Arthur Peirson was born in Newcastle-on Tyne, England, in 1867 and arrived in Queensland as a teenager in 1885. He worked as a clerk in the prison service, rising to become the chief clerk of prisons by 1904. During that year he was appointed as superintendent at Boggo Road gaol, a position he held until his death in 1933. During this time he also served as Comptroller-General (1919-26). He married Florence Drury in September 1897, and they had their only child, a boy named Duncan, in 1900.

An enthusiastic sportsman who loved football, rowing and polo, Peirson was also associated with the Queensland Military Forces, in which he rose to the rank of Major and received the Victorian Decoration for long and distinguished service.

He was also noted for the energy that he applied to prison management. Although a strict disciplinarian, he was nevertheless a humanitarian who instigated many reforms, notably the teaching of trades such as tailoring and mat making to long-serving prisoners. He studied these trades closely so that he could personally supervise the prisoners.

Peirson was popular with the staff and also, apparently, with a female reporter who visited the gaol in 1904. She described him in glowing terms:

“...a joy to the eye and a pleasure to the ear, for Captain Pearson [sic] is the most handsome and smooth-voiced man this experienced *connoisseur* has seen for quite a long time, and she immediately decided that the “lydy” prisoners have at least one daily treat in their monotonous lives, that of gazing for a short space of time on an almost perfect specimen of manly beauty.”

(*Truth*, 13 March 1904)

Many of the prisoners had a great respect for him, and when he became gravely ill in 1933 some of the old timers would visit his quarters in the gaol and place a posy of flowers on the windowsill of his bedroom. It was in these quarters that Peirson died one afternoon in May 1933 after a long illness. The warders leaving at the end of shift took it in turns to march towards his residence, halt a few paces from the entrance, and salute in silence for a few moments before marching out of the gates.

His funeral was well attended, with many government dignitaries paying their respects, including the Lieutenant Governor. The coffin was borne by six Boggo Road warders through a guard of honour. The Home Secretary commented that under Peirson, the prison system had changed from “one of cruelty and harshness to something approaching humaneness”. The most telling message of sympathy came from the prisoners of the No.1 and No.2 Divisions of Boggo Road gaol, who reportedly sent “two letters couched in touching terms”.



Major A.T. Peirson

During his time at the gaol, Peirson attended the executions of twelve prisoners.