Castlemaine Cemetery Burial Recovery Project
Community Information

You may have heard about activity at Castlemaine Cemetery and have questions about what is happening, why, and whether you should be concerned. This document is designed to answer those questions honestly and openly.

Know Your Place has been engaged by the Castlemaine Cemetery Trust to manage the Castlemaine Cemetery Burial Recovery Project, on a pro-bono basis. We welcome questions from anyone and are committed to ensuring that accurate, complete information is available to all who want it.

> *Transparency is core to this project, and it is what the community deserves. We recognise the sensitivity and responsibility of the work we are undertaking and aim to earn the community's trust through our actions, care and openness.*

What Is Happening at Castlemaine Cemetery?

The Castlemaine Cemetery Burial Recovery Project is a carefully managed heritage initiative with a straightforward but important purpose: to locate, document, and respectfully reinter human remains that were displaced from their original burial locations during cemetery operations over several decades.

This is not a new discovery. A 1994 police investigation confirmed that human remains had been systematically disturbed and deposited in spoil piles within the cemetery grounds. Critically, records show that relevant authorities had identified and instructed the Trust to cease this practice as far back as 1963, and again in 1980. Despite this, the practice continued, and the displaced remains were never recovered after the 1994 investigation.

More than three decades later, that changes. Castlemaine Cemetery Trust Chairperson Debra Tranter had been pushing for this to be addressed for years before the right partners and pathways came together. This project exists because she didn't stop asking.

Why Is This Happening Now?

The displacement of human remains from their burial places is a matter of deep ethical concern. Those whose remains were disturbed, people from across Castlemaine's diverse community, have been waiting, without dignity, for this to be addressed.

The project is now possible because there is a clearer framework for undertaking this kind of sensitive archaeological work responsibly, with appropriate regulatory oversight, specialist expertise, and genuine community engagement.

> *Dignity is not a courtesy in heritage practice; it is an obligation. This project exists because the people connected to this cemetery deserve to have their remains treated with the same care and respect as anyone else.*

Whose Remains Are We Talking About?

Castlemaine Cemetery, established in 1852, is one of Victoria's most historically significant goldfields burial grounds. The people buried in its older sections reflect the full diversity of the colonial goldfields community. The displaced remains include people from many different backgrounds, and we want those communities to know this project is working on their behalf.

Communities with connections to the affected sections include:

- **Chinese community members:** a significant number of Chinese goldfields community members are buried in the cemetery, and many were within the disturbed areas. We are actively seeking guidance from Chinese community organisations on how to approach this with appropriate care.
- **Irish Catholic families:** Irish Catholic families: the earliest sections of the cemetery were non-denominational, meaning Catholic community members are buried throughout Sections A, B and D alongside people of all faiths. These are the sections most affected by the disturbances.
- **Scottish and English Protestant families:** including Presbyterian, Anglican, Methodist, Wesleyan and other non-conformist communities.
- **Women who died violently:** we are aware of women buried in the disturbed sections whose deaths were the result of serious violence. We are committed to ensuring their stories and dignity are central to this project.
- **Families from across the goldfields region:** including Campbells Creek, Barkers Creek, Sandy Creek, Tarrangower, Newstead, and many surrounding communities.

If your family, community, or cultural group has a connection to Castlemaine Cemetery, particularly the older sections of A, B and D, we want to hear from you. Your knowledge matters to this project.

What Is Actually Happening on the Ground?

The project is proceeding carefully and in stages. No excavation has taken place yet. The current phase of work involves:

- Historical research to understand the full scope and timeline of past disturbances, including burial registers, coroner's records, and minute books
- Oral history recording; conversations with community members and others who hold knowledge about what happened and where
- Consultation with the community, cultural representatives, and regulatory authorities
- A pedestrian survey of spoil piles within the cemetery grounds to record their location and extent using GPS
- Preparation of site documentation for submission to Heritage Victoria

Before any ground disturbance takes place, a formal Archaeological Research Design will be prepared and approved by Heritage Victoria. All work is conducted in accordance with the Heritage Act 2017 (Victoria), the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 (Victoria), the Burra Charter, and professional standards for the treatment of human skeletal remains.

What is not happening:

- No excavation has taken place or is planned without proper regulatory approval
- No remains are being handled at this stage. When recovery work does begin, it will be conducted carefully, respectfully, and only under formal regulatory approval and with appropriate cultural protocols in place.
- This is not a commercial project; it is a heritage recovery initiative driven by ethical obligation, with project management completed pro-bono and many volunteer hours from the archaeology community
- There are no plans to exhume or disturb intact, undisturbed graves

Your Knowledge Matters

Community knowledge; oral histories, family stories, things people witnessed or heard about, is a vital part of understanding what occurred and where remains may have been deposited. The official record tells part of the story. The community holds the rest.

We are particularly interested in hearing from people who:

- Have family connections to burials in the older sections of the cemetery (Sections A, B and D in particular)
- Worked at the cemetery, or knew people who did, at any point in the twentieth century
- Have memories or family stories about the cemetery's history
- Are connected to the Chinese goldfields community and have knowledge of or interest in the Chinese burials at Castlemaine Cemetery (please note that Section P is not impacted)
- Have information about the Blanket Gully Road area near Campbells Creek, which is a related site of interest
- Simply want to know more, or have concerns to raise directly

There is no obligation in reaching out. You are in control of what you share and how. All information is handled sensitively and with respect for the person sharing it.

Who Is Involved and Who Is Overseeing This?

The project operates under a formal governance structure with clear accountability:

- Castlemaine Cemetery Trust: the site custodian and principal, who established the project and holds ultimate responsibility for the cemetery
- Know Your Place: engaged pro-bono as project manager under a formal Project Coordination and Stewardship Agreement
- Heritage Victoria: the regulatory authority overseeing all archaeological work under the Heritage Act 2017
- Chinese community organisations: relationships actively being built; guidance welcomed
- Religious community representatives: engaged regarding the customs and wishes of affected communities
- Specialist archaeologists and heritage practitioners: engaged for their specific expertise

Every stage of this work is subject to regulatory oversight. This project is expected to take several years, to ensure approvals, ethics and respect throughout.

What Values Are Guiding This Work?

Know Your Place is a heritage consultancy with a specific and considered approach to this kind of work. Our practice is guided by commitments that shape every decision we make.

> *We centre dignity and memory. We recognise that the way we treat the remains of people who have died, and the stories we tell about them, reflects the kind of community we are. Heritage is not about objects and structures alone. It is about people.*

This means we will not rush this work, we will not cut corners, and we will not make decisions about reinterment without consulting the families and communities who are connected to those who are displaced.

> *We engage with care and build trust — not to manage opposition, but because the people connected to this place deserve to be part of the process, not observers of it.*

How Is the Community Being Kept Informed?

Open communication has been central to the project from the beginning. This includes:

- Direct outreach to families with connections to burials in affected areas where details are known
- Consultation with Chinese community organisations, and religious community representatives
- Liaison with Mount Alexander Shire Council, Parks Victoria, DEECA, Heritage Victoria, Department of Health and the Coroner's Office
- A dedicated project page at knowyourplace.au with regular updates as the work progresses
- Public information sessions where appropriate as the project develops

If you have not received information directly and feel you should have, please contact us. We want to hear from you.

Common Questions

Is this legal? Who is authorising this work?

Yes. The project is conducted under the Heritage Act 2017 (Victoria) and is subject to oversight by Heritage Victoria. All archaeological investigation requires formal regulatory approval before it proceeds. The project also operates under the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006.

Is this disturbing graves that have not been disturbed before?

No. The project is specifically focused on locating and recovering remains that were already displaced from their original burial locations during past cemetery operations. The project's purpose is to end that disturbance, not to create new disturbance. Intact, undisturbed graves are not part of this project's scope.

Why wasn't this dealt with after the 1994 police investigation?

That is a fair and important question. The short answer is that it should have been, and it wasn't. Records show that authorities had identified this practice and instructed the Trust to cease it in 1963 and again in 1980, decades before the 1994 investigation. The Trust's current leadership has made addressing this history a priority. We cannot change what happened in the past, but we can make sure it is handled properly now.

My family has a connection to this cemetery. Should I be worried?

If your family has connections to burials in the older sections of the cemetery, particularly from the nineteenth or early twentieth century (Sections A, B and D), there is a possibility that your family member's burial may have been affected. We encourage you to contact us directly so we can discuss your specific situation. We hold limited contact details for descendants, so we rely on families reaching out to us.

I am connected to the Chinese community, is this project working with my community?

Yes, and we want to do this well. We are actively building relationships with Chinese community organisations. If you have a connection to this community and would like to be part of the conversation about how this project proceeds, please reach out to us directly. Your guidance matters.

I have information about what happened at the cemetery in the past. Should I share it?

Yes, please. Oral histories and community knowledge are a vital part of understanding what occurred and where remains may have been deposited. We handle all information sensitively and with respect for the person sharing it. There is no obligation, you are in control of what you share and how.

Who do I speak to if I am not happy with how this is being handled?

You can contact Know Your Place directly, details are below. You are also welcome to raise concerns with the Castlemaine Cemetery Trust or with Heritage Victoria as the regulatory authority. We would always prefer to hear concerns from you directly so we can respond, but we respect that you may wish to engage through other channels.

We Are Here to Talk

No question is too small. If you have heard something about this project that concerns you, whether it is a rumour, a partial account, or something that simply didn't sit right, we would welcome the opportunity to speak with you directly.

This project is being undertaken in the open, with care, and with the specific intention of doing right by the people whose remains were displaced and the community that continues to care about this cemetery. The people buried here, Chinese goldfields workers, Irish and Scottish and English settlers, women whose stories deserve to be told, all deserve the same dignity. That is what this project is for.

Contact Know Your Place

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knowyourplace.au

Thank you for taking the time to read this. Your interest in this place and this project is part of what makes it matter.