

Apex Pioneer Memorial Park (Urch Street Cemetery)

The Apex Pioneer Memorial Park (Urch Street Cemetery) is the final resting place for over 1,000 of Geraldton's earliest residents. While headstones no longer mark the sites of most graves, please treat the grounds with respect and sensitivity.

Despite burials having taken place earlier, this site was officially marked out as a cemetery by Assistant Surveyor William Phelps in January 1863. Later that year a parsonage was constructed nearby for the Anglican Archdeacon and in October 1864, the new Geraldton Cemetery was consecrated by Bishop Hale. Back along Eleanor Street (now Chapman Road) a foundation stone for the St Francis Xavier Church was laid in February 1869 completing, much to the delight of the townspeople, a religious precinct around the new cemetery, which was to be shared by Anglicans and Roman Catholics.

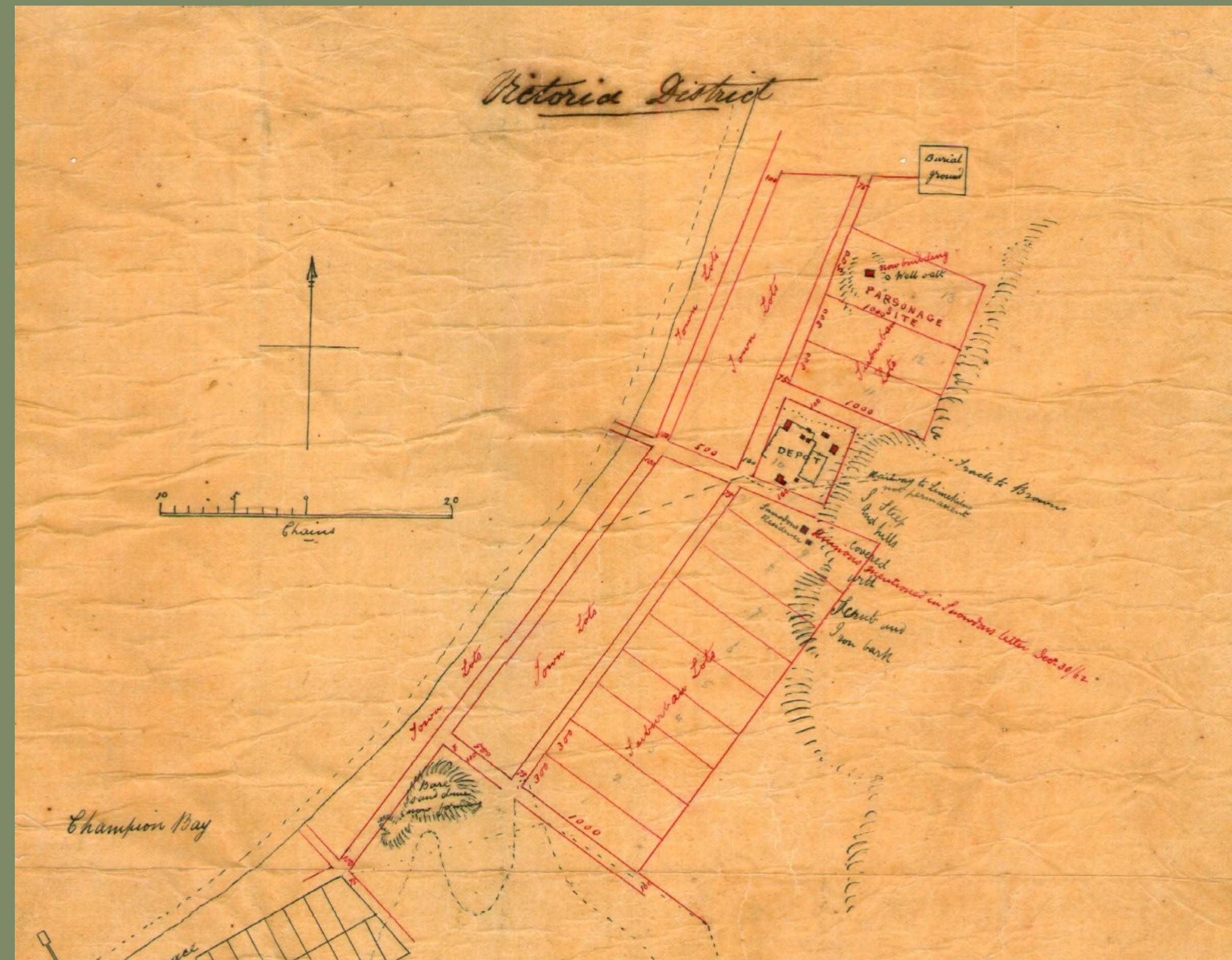
To accommodate Methodists, Presbyterians and those classified as "Non-specific" an additional cemetery reserve situated near the government quarries along Eastern Road was surveyed by John Forrest in 1871. Over the years both the Urch Street and Eastern Road Cemeteries became crowded and a new cemetery was opened at Utakarra in 1930. Sadly, the old cemeteries quickly became neglected and overgrown, leaving one Geraldton resident to write to the newspaper.

"Being the custodians of God's Acre, we stand idly by in condoning its wholesale desecration. It's disgraceful state can scarcely be exaggerated ... a visit by any of your readers will satisfy them that it is a rendezvous of all classes of stock, from rabbits to cattle. Very many times you will see thirty or more cows grazing there."

(Geraldton Guardian & Express, 3 December 1932, p.1)

Despite ongoing efforts to maintain the grounds, in 1956 a news headline read "Old Cemeteries Shocking Blot on Landscape". The following year the Church of England offered up the conditional transfer of the cemetery land to the Geraldton Municipal Council.

In 1967, seeing an opportunity for a worthy project, the Geraldton Apex Club sought approval from the Council to undertake restoration work at the old Urch Street Cemetery. Before the project commenced a survey of all headstone and graves was conducted by Lou Eves and Ron Parkin. Extensive scrub and undergrowth clearing



Allotments in Geraldton as surveyed by William Phelps, 24/01/1863. State Records Office of WA.

followed and the majority of old headstones were removed, although notable markers, such as the memorials for Resident Magistrate Thomas Brown (1803-1863) and Mining Warden John Michael Finnerty (1853-1913) were retained. A park was created on the site and named in honour of the district's founding citizens. During the 1990s a group named the Apex Memorial Park Action Group played a pivotal role in protecting the site from encroaching development. In later years, a

grant to celebrate the Centenary of Federation (2001) was secured and further site restoration was undertaken by Apex. The freestanding headstones, along with others that had been stored at the Council Depot, were incorporated into gardens and the Centenary of Federation Memorial Wall located at the rear of the site.