

A BRIEF HISTORY IF THE FIRM:

Alexander Will, a Blacksmith of Aberdeen in Scotland, arrived in this country aboard the “Bermondsey” in November 1859. He was accompanied by his wife **Sarah (nee Hay)** and two small sons. The couple eventually had a family of 5 sons and 3 daughters.

It is not known when the firm began but there is evidence that it was functioning in 1879 and may well have begun about 6 years prior to that. Unfortunately the diaries have only survived from 1900.

Sarah died in 1914 and Alexander in March 1915. Their son, John Chalmers Will, then ran the firm until his death in 1952 when it passed to a relative, **Oliver Douglas Inggs** and became known as Inggs Undertakers.

Oliver was known far and wide as “**O.D.**” and the locals knew the firm always as “Will’s Parlour” until the last of the generation that remembered the Will connection had passed on! O.D. ran the business and was an active participant in the daily affairs until his death on 30 June 1996 at the very advanced aged of 92 years.

Still under the name of Inggs Undertakers it passed to the **Wolmarans** family – **Mary Bowker** (formerly Wolmarans) being a niece of O.D.’s and in 2004 is still being operated by Mary who is now a widow.

EXPLANATORY NOTES ON THE DATA CAPTURED FROM THE DIARIES

DIARIES COVER PERIOD 1 JANUARY 1900 TO 3 MAY 1996

In the **Period 1900 – 1914** NOT all the burials that took place have been entered into the diaries.

** Indicates information obtained from death and/or funeral notices in Grocott’s Daily Mail and cuttings glued or loose in the “Scrap Books” of the period to 1912.

* Indicates that an Obituary and/or Eulogy will be found on the page in the “Scrap Book” as per separate alphabetical list for the period to 1912

“SCRAP BOOKS”

While the first of these is dated 1902 they also cover a lengthy period starting about 1878. They continue until 1914 but after 1912 there is little in them.

They cover births, marriages, deaths, obituaries, eulogies from the Grahamstown and Port Elizabeth newspapers as well as information on the Free Masons of which Alexander Will was a member. There are a number of cutting from Scottish Newspapers – mainly poetry – and information on people of note from the U.K. In some cases (such as the death of Inigo Jones) the person’s death is entered in the relevant diary!

SPELLING OF NAMES

Corrections were made where names were very obviously misspelt.

Many names were captured as they appeared allowing for the many variations available

Where a name was illegible, undecipherable or in doubt a ?? was added.

From 1952 the writing is very difficult to follow and at times it is almost impossible to determine the difference between k, b and th; m and n; g,j. and y; p and f. It is therefore very probable that many Black African names have been incorrectly captured and for this I sincerely apologise.

RELIGION:

In some cases the minister conducting the funeral is from a denomination other than that given as being the religion of the deceased. It is possible that the religion has been incorrectly stated in the diaries.

In later years only the name of the minister or priest is given and not the religion. Because their names were unknown to me it was not possible to capture the religion of the deceased.

In the 1900-1915 period the term R.I.P. entered without a religion denotes Roman Catholic and was a

standard entry type for the period.

STILLBIRTHS, INFANTS AND CHILDREN:

From 1967 stillbirths were no longer captured UNLESS the name of one of the parents (usually the father) and/or an address was quoted.

No unnamed infant deaths were entered unless the surname of the mother or father was quoted.

No entries were captured for children without surnames and/or first names if they were simply given as "relative of" the person paying for the coffin

STATE BURIALS; INDIGENT; PAUPER BURIALS:

People dying in a State Institution such as a Hospital, Mental Home or Frail Care facility and who had no relatives, were indigent or their relatives were indigent had their burial paid for by the **State**.

There were set fees for such burials and the person was often buried in a section of the cemetery allotted to the State (such as in the New Cemetery). They could also be buried in the small portion of "free ground" which each denomination had attached to their section.

Any extra costs above the set fees had to be paid for by the relatives and no gravestones were allowed to be erected. In a number of cases gravestones did appear years later when a descendant had money to do it but it was still illegal.

Chaplains were appointed to each institution in the early days, thus most of the early burials of this nature were conducted either by the Dominee of the D.R.C. or a minister from the Anglican church.

In later years the term "**Indigent**" was used as the reference for a State Burial in the Diaries.

Pauper burials were generally among the non white population and were paid for by the Municipality to whom the relatives applied for aid.

EMBALMING:

Prior to 1928 this was not requested or required even for bodies being transported by train to other centers, nor does there appear to have been any specialized sealing of coffins or the requirement of metal linings.

Embalming suddenly became "fashionable" among the locals even though funerals were still conducted within 24 hours of death and the trip to the cemetery was a very short one.

This lasted about a decade and became very rare after the 2nd World War.

By this time coffins transported away from town had to be hermetically sealed and the bodies arterially embalmed. Later still it became law to transport bodies either in metal lined caskets or metal caskets made especially for transport purposes only.

COFFIN ONLY; NATIVE COFFINS; COFFINS SUPPLIED OUT OF TOWN:

In the early period people living on farms and in the small villages still organized their own funerals. A request was sent to the firm for a coffin of the required size, colour and furnishings which would then be sent by the next bus or train to the nearest station or siding. People were generally buried in their "Sunday best" and shrouds were rarely requested.

Native coffins formed a large part of the firm's sales each year. They were pine boxes without lids and were inexpensive. These went to farms and a large volume went to Alicedale right from the early days. The dead were buried very soon after death until the early 1970's when it became a custom to have large funerals on a Saturday to which the community was invited.

From about 1965 the coffins began to have lids attached and by the mid 1970's a sheet of glass was placed between the body and the lid presumably to allow for viewing and to form a seal as by this period the bodies had usually been in refrigeration for at least a week.

By 1996 these coffins had ceased to be bought in favour of "normal" coffins and occasionally very expensive metal caskets.

SPANISH 'FLU EPIDEMIC OF 1918:

The records for 1918 show an unusual steady increase right from January in the number of deaths.

These reached their peak for the period from 11 October to the end of that month.

Only names of those buried were recorded at this time with no detail as to age, religion etc and there is no certainty that all the dead were listed. The entries appear to have been made after hours or whenever they had the time during this hectic 3 weeks.

THE HOSPITALS:

The Albany General Hospital:

This hospital had probably been built in the middle 1860's below the Clay Pits and almost directly north of the top of Lawrence Street. By the turn of the century it had become inadequate and there had been frequent outbreaks of various fevers among the patients and staff which caused a number of unnecessary deaths.

Largely people still died at their homes. The main deaths at the Albany were stillborn infants (and sometimes their mothers), people of colour and children under the age of 8 years.

After 1922 when the new hospital had been built this became a Maternity hospital and continued as such until it was razed around the years just after the 2nd World War.

The Prince Alfred Infirmary/The P.A.I./The Prince Alfred Hospital/The "Chronic Sick":

Built in Prince Alfred's Road near the University it seems to have acted initially as a stop gap between the Albany and the Settlers Hospital and was always known by the variety of names mentioned above. In later years it served as a Frail Care, Terminal illness and Infectious diseases institution.

In the early years of the 1950's the hospital burned down and for about two years the patients were accommodated in the Rhodes University Sanatorium while it was rebuilt.

During the first part of the 1970's the building was purchased by the University and the patients were then sent to the West Wing of the Settlers Hospital.

To die in the "Chronic Sick" was considered by the elderly residents of the town to be the worst thing that could possibly happen to you but none of them could explain this thinking!

The Settlers Hospital:

The first recorded death as per the Diaries is early November of 1922 and it can be safely assumed that it had opened its' doors not long before this date.

With time the hospital took on all the functions of a general hospital although most infectious cases were sent to the Elizabeth Donkin Hospital in Port Elizabeth, which was a specialist infectious disease hospital.

West Wing 1 and West Wing 2 opened around 1970 specifically for the handling of the frail and those with terminal diseases. By 1990 these wings were known as **Barrett Wing 1** and **Barrett Wing 2**.

As time passed the number of people dying in this hospital continued to rise considerably until, according to the diaries, more than 90 per cent of all the deaths occurred there as opposed to those who died at their homes.

"The Asylum"/"The Mental"/Fort England Mental Hospital/Fort England Hospital:

Over the 96 years covered by the diaries an astonishing number of people died in this hospital, known by varying names with each passing generation.

The ages of the deceased ranged from 12 years to 102 years and came from every part of South Africa. There is no doubt that a number of the inmates suffered from such diseases as epilepsy, cerebral palsy and Down's syndrome about which little was known and it was not only difficult to care for them at home but was a social stigma of enormous proportions to have a relative so afflicted. They were often placed in this institution and forgotten.

Much later it became apparent from the diaries that when the spouse of an elderly person died the surviving spouse would be placed in Fort England. Often these folk had diseases such as Alzheimers Disease or were incapable of looking after themselves. Their families were often living elsewhere in the country and many were away from home all day and could neither look after their relative nor afford the fees for someone else to do it for them. By then the general stigma of being less than perfect had largely gone from the communal thinking. By then too most of the deceased were buried in private plots with proper funerals paid for by their family or their Funeral insurance.

Many were sent to other centers for burial. Some came from other areas and others were sent to their relatives' place of abode.

IT MUST BE NOTED that seldom was a distinction made between an inmate of Fort England and a family member of one of the employees who lived in cottages in the grounds.

The comment **"Of/Bur"** in the comment column is used when there is doubt as to whether the person was buried in the town mentioned or came from the town mentioned and was buried in Grahamstown.

FUNERAL INSURANCE:

While no specific reference is made to it in the captured data, these insurances began in Grahamstown when Goodall and Williams appear on the scene in 1922.

Initially, and for many years, these policies were used almost exclusively by the Coloured community (who also had the Wesleyan Burial Fund) and the very indigent among the white population. Again, having a funeral policy was not entirely socially acceptable as it suggested that you had insufficient funds in the bank!

By the end of the diaries in 1996 almost all burials had some if not all of the expenses paid via a policy right across all races.

REMOVED FROM GRAHAMSTOWN/REMOVED TO PORT ELIZABETH ETC.:

Unless it is specifically stated that a person was removed to another town “for burial” only the above terms have been used in the comments.

“**Removed from Grahamstown**” indicates that a body was removed to an unspecified destination by another funeral undertaker or by relatives of the deceased.

Firms such as Jones & Rice of Port Elizabeth had branches in several towns as did AVBOB and often no mention was made of the destination – very often these removals were from Fort England.

Port Elizabeth could also have been just the first stop for a body which might be air freighted to another center or taken to a farm in the Langkloof etc., without the diary specifying the final destination.

“COFFIN FOR” or “COFFIN FORWARDED TO”:

Entries such as these were not captured as there was no proof that the coffin was for the body of the named person. It could have been sent to the person who ordered it for someone else. Only entries which state “for the late” have been entered.

NO COMMENTS IN THE COMMENT COLUMN:

These burials were generally requested by one of the hospitals with whom the firm had contracts for very many years until the rise of the black undertaking firms took over the bulk of the business.

Included in this list would be the Municipalities of the area, Burial funds, Burial Insurers etc.

In most cases only the name of the person and the date of death are given.

In the first 60 years of the diaries this also covers farm labourers for whom the farmer requested a coffin but no farm name or area was quoted.

MEMBERS OF RELIGIOUS ORDERS:

Nuns belonging to both the Roman Catholic and Anglican orders in Grahamstown and Port Alfred often had no surname or birth first names entered in the diary. These will be found in the surname column as **NO NAME**.

CREMATIONS AND ASHES:

In rare instances prior to the 2nd World War bodies were sent to Johannesburg for cremation as that was the only crematorium in the country at the time.

In some cases the ashes may have been returned to Grahamstown and in others the ashes were sent to overseas destinations..

The Crematorium at Port Elizabeth began operating in 1952 and East London also opened one, possible a little later.

At this time cremation was still very rare among the Christian population but Hindu’s were sent to Port Elizabeth to be cremated at their own crematorium in North End Cemetery.

By 1970 the popularity of cremation was growing and by the end of the Diaries in 1996 well over 90 per cent of deceased were cremated.

It must be **assumed** that the majority of ashes were returned to Grahamstown to be buried in family plots, placed in the Columbarium at the new cemetery or at their church, or scattered.

Very few burials of ashes by the firm are indicated in the diaries.

Many relatives themselves collected the ashes from Port Elizabeth and organized the disposal thereof.

While it was not illegal to bury ashes privately in the grave of a family member it was frowned upon by the authorities as they did not receive the specified fee and the **persons name was not entered into the municipal burials book** which means that unless a family member remembers what happened to the ashes, there is no record other than at the Crematorium.

The Crematorium records will only note that the ashes “were removed” if they were taken by relatives.

It must be noted that many of the ashes buried by the firm do NOT correspond with a previous funeral organized by the firm. In these cases the person **may** (for example) have died in the Port Elizabeth hospital, been immediately cremated and then the ashes sent to the firm for disposal.

Most of those who died in the hospital or in their homes had funeral services in their church before being taken to Port Elizabeth for cremation. Generally those from other centers like Port Alfred etc., who died in the hospital were taken to Port Alfred etc., for the service but many had a service at Christ Church which seemed rather popular for this purpose.

Some were sent directly to Port Elizabeth and is presumed that the service took place at the crematorium.

Those that were sent to East London for cremation appear mainly to have been people whose roots were in East London or whose families lived there and their ashes were then disposed of there.

RELIGIONS OTHER THAN CHRISTIAN:

Chinese people were sent to Port Elizabeth for burial in North End Cemetery as this was, by Chinese culture, the “right” place for them to be buried.

Muslims, if there were any living in Grahamstown, were buried by their community.

Jews were buried by the firm in their own cemetery but in later years they had their own burial society who handled the laying-out and burials from the premises of the undertakers.

“DIED & BURIED”

Comments such as “Died and Buried at Salem” do not clearly indicate that in **every** case the body was brought to Grahamstown for preparation before being returned for burial.

In later years non whites who died in places such as Alexandria or Alicedale were collected and kept in the refrigerator at the firm for a week or more before being returned for burial.

In some cases bodies were brought to the firm by the relatives from outlying areas and farms and on occasion were collected by relatives for burial without the services of the undertakers beyond having prepared the body for burial.

THE LAST ENTRY IN THE DIARIES IS DATED 3 MAY 1996