

Media Release



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NEW SOUTH WALES

New exhibition unearths Central Station's deep dark history!

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Thousands of people travel through Sydney's Central Station every day, but how many know what was there before?

The untold stories buried deep beneath Central Station will be unearthed in the State Library's haunting new exhibition, opening on Saturday 25 May 2019.

Dead Central brings to life the voices from the Devonshire Street Cemetery where, between 1820 and 1900, over 30,000 people were laid to rest in the sandhills bordered by Elizabeth, Pitt and Devonshire streets – where Central Station now stands.

The exhibition centres on the amazing work of local history buffs Josephine and Arthur Foster. When the state government announced its intention to clear the overgrown and abandoned cemetery, the Fosters knew they had to act quickly or this incredible history of Sydney's buried past would be lost forever!

According to exhibition curator Elise Edmonds, the Fosters spent every free moment over two years meticulously documenting mostly the Church of England section of the vast cemetery. This was the largest among the seven sectioned denominations, and where numerous notable Sydneysiders were buried, including: Mary Reibey, Cora Gooseberry and brewer James Squire.

"Mrs Foster photographed the headstones and Mr Foster carefully inked and copied the beautiful, evocative and tragic inscriptions on the headstones," said Ms Edmonds. Examples can be seen below.

"They amassed an extraordinary collection which provides a fantastic snapshot of 19th society before this dodgy and seedy part of old Sydney – which emitted foul-smelling gasses and where corners of coffins poked from the ground – was later cleared to make way for a new transport system."

The haunting story of Devonshire Cemetery (also known as Sandhills Cemetery) is told through a 35-minute audio recording. Using their own devices, visitors are guided through the immersive exhibition space, revealing the layers of history on this site – the consecration of the cemetery, the burials, the rapid growth of the city around the site, the closure and exhumation of the bodies to make way for Central Station in 1901.



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“Visitors are transported to today’s ghost platform, a hidden part of Central Station rarely open to the public, and will hear headstone inscriptions being read like ghosts whispering to you,” said Ms Edmonds.

“*Dead Central* highlights that in Sydney there’s always a hidden story, and nothing is ever as it seems.”

Dead Central opens on Saturday 25 May and runs until 17 November 2019. Subscribe to the new podcast series – *The Burial Files* – launching 10 June 2019.

More information: www.sl.nsw.gov.au/deadcentral

MEDIA INQUIRIES:

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Examples of headstone inscriptions:

*Sacred to the memory of Samuel and Easter [Esther] Bradley who were Inhumanely Murdered by their own Servant on the 15th August 1822
S.B. Aged 59 Years
E.B Aged 65 Years*

*Harriet Mary Sheba
Only daughter of Joseph Hyde Potts
Who ceased to breathe
On the 5th day of December 1838*

*Sacred to the memory of William Oliver who was accidently killed by a Bullock Cart
April the 2d. 1821
Aged 34 years*

*Joseph Charles Tremayne
Only son of Joseph Hyde Potts
Of the Bank of N.S. Wales
Who resigned his spirit
On the 9th day of November 1838*

*Sacred
to the memory of Mary Curran who was found Drowned August 1st 1821
Aged 46 Years
The Mother of Storers children*

* Mary Curran drowned in a puddle on Hunter Street in the middle of Sydney!