

ABSTRACT

“Let us praise illustrious men and women, our ancestors in their successive generations. Their bodies have been buried in peace and their names live on for all generations. The peoples will proclaim their wisdom, the assembly will celebrate their praises.” (Ecclesiasticus 44:1, 10-15)

Historical Archaeology over the last few decades has been saturated by literature of cemetery studies. Many theories have been put forward as to why changes in mortuary practices have occurred, particularly in regard to changes in mortuary monuments. A large contingent of these studies has come to the conclusion that it is social status and the wish to glorify high social classes that is driving the changes in mortuary display. This study will test this assumption using the mortuary monuments of Nowra General Cemetery.

The theoretical framework of this study focuses on the work of Randall H. McGuire (1988) and his study of the monuments of Broome County cemeteries. McGuire (1988) discovered that there was shift in the designs of the monuments between the late 19th/early 20th centuries and the mid-late 20th century. He concluded that the wealthy individuals during the late 19th/early 20th centuries were glorifying their social status through the use of elaborate headstones, which emphasised the gap between the rich and the poor. In the mid-late 20th century, McGuire found that this glorification was no longer happening and that in fact the headstones and their uniform style were down playing social status, ultimately denying that inequalities existed within the cemetery and the

community. This shift in mortuary designs McGuire termed “mystification based on naturalization to a denial of inequalities and power relations” (McGuire 1988:436).

This study focuses on the shift observed by McGuire (1988) and asks if this shift is also happening within the Nowra General Cemetery between the period of 1890-1910 and 1950-1970. The principle result of this investigation found that the same shift suggested by McGuire (1988) could not be observed in Nowra General Cemetery, but that a shift did occur. This shift was primarily the result of beliefs about death in each of the periods, rather than individual social status. In fact, contrary to many papers written about the subject, the beliefs about death were the primary reason for most of the changes which occurred within Nowra General Cemetery, with social status playing a secondary role. It is recommended that further studies of Australian cemeteries be conducted in order to determine if this discovery is a nation wide phenomena or if it is just confined to the grounds of the Nowra General Cemetery.

Chapter 1 will look at the broad theory of cemetery studies, especially in regard to the study of social status. The theoretical framework will be discussed and the rationale and question will be proposed.

Chapter 2 will focus on the Shoalhaven’s social and economic history in order to place the study into a social context. The individuals buried under the headstones selected for

this study will be discussed along with the history of the monumental masons whose work influenced the changes in design within the cemetery.

Chapter 3 is the research design and methods chapter, where the methodology used is specified. This chapter discusses the site and monument selection methods and presents a detailed analysis of the recording and research methods used to identify the individuals in the study. It also gives details of how social status was determined and specifies the limitations of the study.

Chapter 4 gives a detailed analysis of the survey results and the variables that were used in order to determine best how social status was being emphasised within the survey sample.

Chapter 5 answers the thesis question by summarising the overall results of the study. It concludes by placing the findings within the context of archaeological cemetery study theory. The conclusion also includes recommendations for future research followed by the closing comments.