Place No. 39 Old Cemetery, Roebourne

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View of grave sites in the Old Cemetery, Roebourne, 2012

LOCATION	
Name of Place	Old Cemetery, Roebourne
Other Name (1)	Roebourne Pioneer Cemetery
Other Name (2)	
Location/Address	
Street Number	
Street Name	Andover Way
Suburb/Town	Roebourne
Other Locational descriptor (text)	mE 514389 mN 7703640 Longitude 117.1382 Latitude -20.7669

OWNERSHIP & LAND DESCRIPTION

Owner	Address	Phone/fax	Status	Item No.
Shire of Roebourne (Lot 385) State of WA (Lot 382)	Andover Way, Roebourne			

Reserve No.	Lot/Location No.	Plan/Diagram	Vol/Folio	Item No.
1234 2377	385 382	P254093	228/9 LR3014/ 54	

LISTING AND ASSESSMENT	
HCWA Reference Number	2338
State Register of Heritage Places:(Y/N)	No
Classified by the National Trust (Y/N)	Yes
Register of the National Estate (Y/N)	Yes
Local Town Planning Scheme (Y/N)	Yes
Management Category	**B**

DESCRIPTION	
Construction Date (1)	Mid 1860s
Construction Date (2)	
Site Type (Place Type)	Other Built Type
Use(s) of Place	

Original	MONUMENT/CEMETERY: Cemetery
Present	MONUMENT/CEMETERY: Cemetery
Other	
Construction Materials:	
Walls	
Roof	
Other	
Condition	Poor
Integrity (how much of the original fabric is intact?):	Little, subject to vandalism

Physical Description

The Old Cemetery, Roebourne is located at the northern base of Mt Welcome, in the area of the Roebourne housing village. The cemetery is enclosed by a wire fence with barbed wire and the enclosure spans an area of 150 x 100 metres. The cemetery is in two sections, one half slightly smaller than the other, with a walkway dividing the two halves of the cemetery. Older graves are likely located outside the boundary of the cemetery. Headstones, predominately made form marble or stone with concrete bases and gravesites fenced with iron, are in poor condition. There is graffiti on some headstones and evidence of vandalism.

History

This was the main cemetery for the district for over 100 years. The site of this cemetery was surveyed in the late 1860s by Robert Sholl, Roebourne's first Magistrate Resident. At the time the cemetery was located outside the town settlement. Sholl commented in 1882 that 'In the early days in the district, the dead were buried outside the settlement, in the bush in fact: subsequently this spot was retained as a burial place and eventually gazetted as a reserve for the purpose of a cemetery.'[1] The earliest recorded burial by the Anglican burial register was in 1875, however it is likely that there were previous burials in the area, dating from c1866. It was not until c1878 that the cemetery was enclosed with a fence and it is likely that unmarked burials lay outside the enclosed area.

A public outcry occurred when Low Ah Yu, described as a 'pagan' was buried in the cemetery by a policeman (Mr Laurence) in 1882. The cemetery was a government reserve at this time, rather than a consecrated cemetery, so all people could be buried there. A Mr McLeod felt it amounted to the cemetery being desecrated and it was reported that 'Prior to this, all Chinamen who had died in the town, were taken by their fellow countrymen and buried in a spot outside the borders of the town.'[2] Sholl in fact had ordered the burial of Malay and Chinese people to a burial ground to the south of Roebourne, 'the recognised burial ground for pagans and heathens.' It was thought however by the police that Low Ah Yu was a Roman Catholic, 'as he fasted once a week (and) had attended the services in the Church on several occasions.' Not only this, but it was revealed that Low Ah Yu had been 'a faithful servant' to Mr Laurence and as 'a most faithful interpreter in several Chinese cases in the Roebourne court under him.' This was disputed by the townspeople with claims that the man had been dishonest, 'swindling money' for a joss house.

Bishop Riley consecrated the Anglican part of the cemetery in 1896, but offered 'I am willing to consecrate any particular graves in the old part where your friends are buried ... (and) I hope too that the fence dividing this portion from the old cemetery will be removed and the whole ground will be enclosed as one.'[3] Included in the 'old cemetery' prior to its enclosure was the policeman Constable Griffiths and his native assistant, and the pearler Breen killed by Aborigines in the episode triggering the Flying Foam Massacre. The 'native assistant' was interred 'about sixty or seventy yards apart from the others.'[4] HTW Burrup, killed in the Union Bank murders of 1885, is also buried in the old cemetery. There is no evidence that any other sections of the cemetery were consecrated in other religious denominations.

Burial records have been kept inconsistently, with very few records kept prior to 1911. Evidence from the 1950s suggests that 'outside the western fence is the portion used a number of years ago for pagan burials.'[5]

Documentary evidence points to an unmarked Aboriginal section of the cemetery. A 1966 audit states that no plan was kept for the native cemetery.[6] It is unclear where the Aboriginal cemetery was located.

In 1975, the Roebourne village housing project was completed surrounding the cemetery, designed to house people from the Roebourne Reserve, which was closed because of overcrowding and poor conditions. It is likely that housing is located on top of gravesites. No consultation with the community was undertaken and people were extremely distressed to be living in such close proximity to the cemetery. A report to the Equal Opportunity Commission in 1990 described 'This ill-conceived example of town planning or (non-planning) has had disastrous consequences for the cemetery. Headstones are frequently overturned and defaced.'[7]

Archaeology
There is the potential for archaeology at this site in locating unmarked graves that were positioned outside the fenced area of the cemetery.

SIGNIFICANCE	
Historic theme (s)	1. DEMOGRAPHIC SETTLEMENT & MOBILITY 103 Racial contact and interaction 104 Land allocation and subdivision 107 Settlements 4. SOCIAL AND CIVIC ACTIVITIES 406 Religion 6. PEOPLE 601 Aboriginal people 602 Early settlers
Statement of Significance:	

This cemetery reflects the life and times of the area and the headstone inscriptions give a window on events and attitudes over time. Historically significant events are invoked through burials of people associated with the Flying Foam Massacre and the Union Bank murders. The changing social fabric of Roebourne is evident through separate burial grounds for the Asian and Aboriginal community illustrating hierarchies of class, culture and religion.

The place reflects the growth of Roebourne and is associated with a number industries and people such as colonial public servants, pastoralists and pearlers who shaped the development of Roebourne.

The cemetery has a high degree of research potential, but its integrity and authenticity is compromised by loss of setting (with the building of the Roebourne village) and through neglect and vandalism.

ASSOCIATIONS	
Architect/Designer (1)	
Architect/Designer (2)	
Other Associated Person(s)	Robert J. Sholl HTW Burrup Alexander McRae

MHI 1996	Site assessed, Place Name Record created
MHI Review 2012	Entry updated

Detail of Thomas Burrup headstone in Old Cemetery, Roebourne, 2012

Roebourne Cemetery, c1900
Courtesy Shire of Roebourne Local History Office, 2005.984

Roebourne Cemetery in the 1970's, courtesy National Trust of Australia (WA)

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[1] Robert Sholl quoted in 'Public Meeting at Roebourne', *West Australian*, 12 May, 1882

[2] 'Public Meeting at Roebourne', *West Australian*, 12 May, 1882

[3] Llyrus Weightman, Report on research of the Roebourne Cemetery and Village, Jan 2002, Local History Collection, Shire of Roebourne.

[4] 'Public Meeting at Roebourne'.

[5] Letter from the Secretary of the Roebourne Roads Board to the Under Secretary of Land, 25 May 1953. Local History Collection, Shire of Roebourne.

[6] Letter to Roebourne Cemetery Board from the Government Inspector fo Municipalities, 21 September 1966. Local History Collection, Shire of Roebourne.

[7] Quoted in Llyrus Weightman, Report on research of the Roebourne Cemetery and Village, Jan 2002, Local History Collection, Shire of Roebourne.