

Pennyweight Flat Cemetery



the Memory of
HUGH JAMES
BRIERLEY
who Died Jan^y 26th
1853.
Aged 14 Months

Quick Facts

An 1850s cemetery looks out over the broad valley of Forest Creek, the site of the great 1852 gold rush.

Access: by car

Period: 1850s

Time: Allow 20-30 minutes there

Stories: Hard times

'Time has dealt rudely with its occupants... The stone tumuli ... are tumbling to decay... The monumental tablets, some of stone and some of wood... time and storm have nearly obliterated the story they once told...'
- Mount Alexander Mail,
13 April 1862.

A frightening lack of clean drinking water was responsible for many deaths on the diggings, particularly of young children.

Fatal accidents were commonplace, too: a mine shaft would cave in, smothering its occupant, or a digger on a stroll after dark would fall into a water-filled hole and drown.

Lawlessness and disappointment added murder and suicide to the common causes of death on the diggings.



Many diggers went nameless to their graves: some were known to their mates, just as 'Bob' or 'Dick'; others died unknown by any name.

The first recorded deaths on the Mount Alexander Diggings were of two small children, who perished of dysentery in November 1851.

The rocky nature of the ground at Pennyweight Flat, for instance, meant that burials were shallow, with just lumps of sandstone mounded on top.

Situated on a hill top, the cemetery made life unpleasant for those who mined and lived on the flat below.

A 'medical gentleman' quoted by the Mount Alexander Mail in 1855 called the cemetery 'a nuisance' and stated that 'the stench of death arising therefrom [is] intolerable'.

The last burial at Pennyweight Flat Cemetery took place in 1857. Just five years later, the place wore the air of abandonment still felt today.