

Building:	Box Hill Cemetery	Significance:	
Address:	Middleborough Road, Box Hill	Melway Map Ref:	47F10
Building Type:	Columbarium	Construction Date:	1928-29
Architect:	Rodney Alsop and A. Bramwell Smith	Builder:	T.F. Crabb



Intactness:		Condition:	
G[x] F[] P[]		G[x] F[] P[]	
Existing Heritage Listings:		Recommended Heritage	
Listings:			
Victorian Heritage Register	[]	Victorian Heritage Register	[x]
National Estate Register	[]	National Estate Register	[x]
National Trust Register	[]	Heritage Overlay Controls	[x]

History

The word "columbarium" is derived from the Latin word *columba* meaning "dove", a "columbarium" being a dovecote or an underground vault with recesses in the walls to receive the ashes of the dead or one of those recesses. A brochure produced by the Box Hill Cemetery Trust defined a columbarium as *a subterranean sepulchre set apart for the reception of urns of ashes*, explaining that its new structure partly fitted that description as it made provision for *burying caskets in concrete chambers below the floor level*. There was also provision for the placement of urns on stone brackets and for memorial tablets of bronze, brass or marble.

Cemetery Trust records relating to the Columbarium are limited to minutes of Trust meetings. The points referring to the Columbarium were brief in the decade 1920 to 1930. They were:

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 3.2.1928 | Sketch plans for proposed Columbarium carefully considered
-view to alterations |
| 4.5.1928 | Letter from the Health Department requesting that proposal to erect Columbarium be deferred 12 months |
| 31.8.1928 | Permission granted (letter) for erection of Columbarium
-questions re the finial cross on the dome and fan lights in the angles of the building |
| 20.3.1929 | Recorded the completion of the building |
| 25.1.1929 | Mentioned costs for spaces in the Columbarium |
| 20.1.1930 | Dispute re Columbarium |

The building was constructed in the form of a Greek cross, cremation and columbaria originating from the pre Christian era of that country. It could be approached via four axial pathways. The external colouring was reminiscent of the Mediterranean with red tiled roof and buff walls. The exterior and richly painted interior decoration was Byzantine in style. On entering the building the architects Rodney Alsop and A. Bramwell Smith of Henty House, Melbourne wanted to evoke the vista of *the tomb of Galla Placidia at Ravenna*. The octagonal tower supports a dome that was described at the time as unusual there being few other examples in the world of its type and a better known example being the *Little Metropole Cathedral at Athens*. The builder was T.F. Crabb of 70 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne. The cost was about 2500 pounds.

The general aim was to *produce a sense of cheerful protection for the tender memory of those who are no longer with us*. The Box Hill Reporter covering the opening of the structure in March 1929, pointed to some other reasons the Trust had for its construction:

Situated on an elevation it is a picturesque concrete erection that can be seen from all parts of the cemetery... (focal point)
the building was part of a scheme of embellishment (ornament)
an education in the modern and hygienic method of the disposal of the dead (sanitation)

The mayor at the time, Councillor Palling, referred to the Trust's action as a *splendid example... in taking such a progressive step*. The Columbarium was described as the *first of its kind erected in the Commonwealth*. Cremation is commonplace today but at that time it was not.

The Box Hill Cemetery dates from 1873 when sanitary conditions and the quality of human life were poor. Death from illness was high, especially among infants. The Christian belief of *keeping the body intact as it awaited resurrection* was one of the views that prejudiced people against cremation however there were promoters of this perceived *radical new disposal of the dead*. By 1920 however only 57 cremations had taken place in Victoria. Factors such as religious beliefs, social attitudes and sanitary considerations were changing and it would appear the Box Hill Cemetery Trustees were keen to be facilitators/promoters of that change.

Description

Located at the centre of a system of radial pathways, the columbarium has the form of a Byzantine church with a Romanesque porch and bronze panelled doors facing north-east. The column capitals are in the Byzantine style and the gable roof to the cruciform plan is surmounted at the crossing by a copper sheathed cupola with Romanesque windows admitting light to the interior. There are Cordovan tiles and lunettes in the ends walls of the arms of the cross, all of the windows being steel framed. A small cross envisaged for the dome is not extant.

Inside, the arms of the cross have either arcaded walls also in the Byzantine style enclosing shelves for the display of urns or panels for the receipt of memorial plaques. The ceilings are barrel vaulted leading to the dome carried on pendentives and have been richly ornamented. The floor slab surmounts a chamber created for the placement of ashes.

Comparative Examples

Other columbaria consist of open ground with walls containing memorial tablets.

Significance

The columbarium at the Box Hill cemetery is situated towards the west end of the ground and was built in 1928-29 for the trustees by T.F. Crabb to the design of architects Rodney Alsop and A. Bramwell Smith. It is historically, aesthetically and socially significant.

It is historically significant (Criterion A) as a very early and therefore innovative example of the practice of cremating human remains at a time when interment was universally accepted. It may be the only structure of its type in the State. It is aesthetically significant (Criterion E) as a picturesque building evoking early Christian images associated with the Byzantine Empire - and subsequently the Greek Orthodox Church, - the use of Byzantine capitals being unusual. Its aesthetic qualities are enhanced by its location at the centre of a system of radial pathways giving it prominence in the cemetery ground. It is socially significant (Criterion G) for its connections with the lives of those memorialized and for the value placed on their continuing memory by descendants and the wider community. The building's association with the noted Melbourne architect, Rodney Alsop, is of note (Criterion H).

Source

Ward, A., Whitehorse Heritage Review 2001

References

"The Columbarium" (brochure), Box Hill Cemetery Trust, 20.3.1929.

Box Hill Historical Society, Notes from the Cemetery Trust Minute books, 1920-1930.

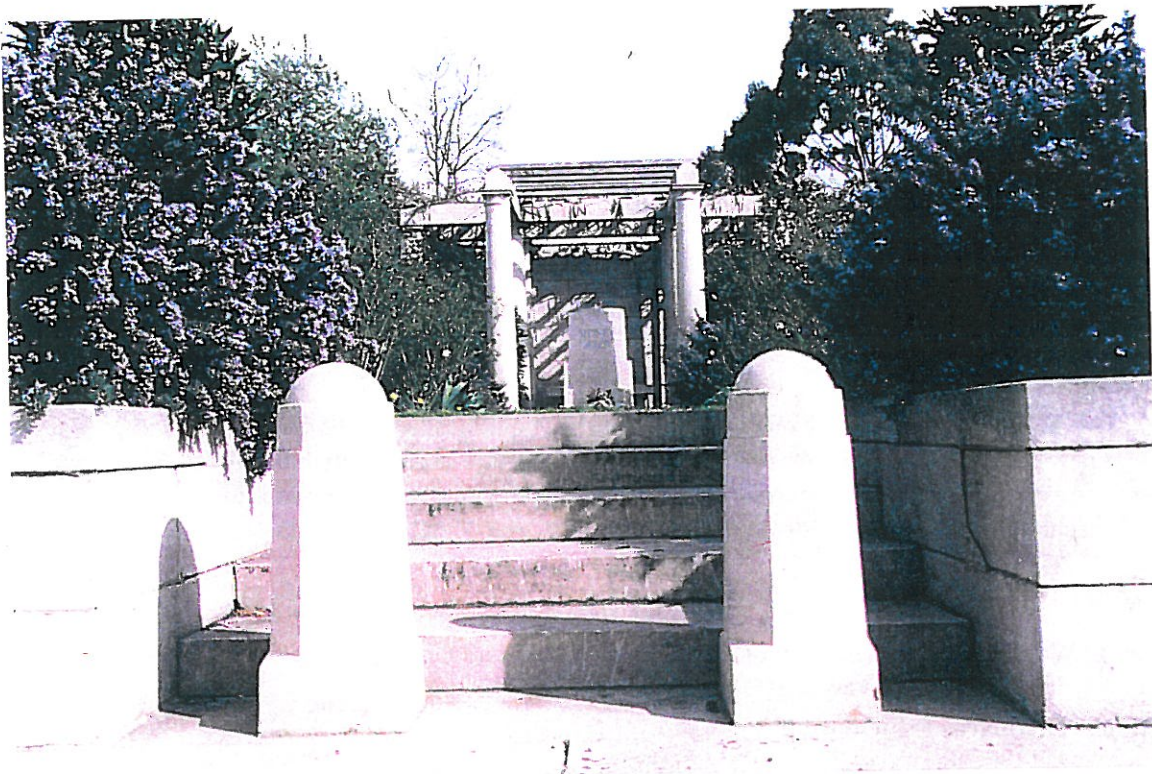
Box Hill Reporter, "Box Hill Columbarium", 22 March 1929.

"The Box Hill Cemetery", National Trust of Australia (Victoria) Classification Report, nd.

Celestina Sagazio (ed.), Cemeteries Our Heritage, National Trust of Australia (Victoria), Melbourne, 1992, pp.5-18.

Building:	Sidney Myer Memorial, Box Hill Cemetery	Significance:	A
Address:	395 Middleborough Road, Box Hill	Melway May Ref:	47 F10

Building Type:	Grave	Construction Date:	1934
Architect:	Sir Edwin Lutyens; Yuncken, Freeman, Freeman & Griffiths	Builder:	Unknown



Intactness:
G[x] F[] P[]

Condition:
G[x] F[] P[]

Existing Heritage Listings:

Victorian Heritage Register	[]
Register of the National Estate	[]
National Trust	[x]

Recommended Heritage Listings:

Victorian Heritage Register	[x]
Register of the National Estate	[x]
Heritage Overlay Controls	[x]

History

Sidney Myer, born Simcha Baeviski in Russia in 1878, was the founder of the Myer department store. He died suddenly of heart failure in September 1934 at the age of 56. His grave in the Box Hill Cemetery was designed by noted British architect Sir Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944) with the local firm of Yuncken, Freeman, Freeman and Griffiths acting as supervising architects. Lutyens' only other known work in Australia was a memorial to Dame Nellie Melba in the Lilydale Cemetery. Sidney Myer's second wife, Merlyn (deceased 1982) is also interred in this grave at Box Hill. The grave also contains the ashes of their son, Kenneth, and his second wife, Yasuko, who were killed in an aeroplane crash in Alaska in 1992.¹

Description

The Sidney Myer Memorial is in the form of a long elevated sandstone platform, accessed from the east end by steps which lead up to a central strip of lawn, flanked on either side by flower beds. A carved altar stone at the head of the memorial bears Sidney Myer's name. The altar is enclosed by a pergola formed of sandstone Tuscan columns supporting slats of bleached teak. Behind this is a stone seat and a wall which is inscribed with the names, and the dates of birth and death, of Sidney, Merlyn, Kenneth and Yasuko Myer. The flower beds are planted with lavender, roses and rosemary, and wisteria grows over the pergola.

Comparative Examples

Garden structure at Woodside, in Buckinghamshire, UK (designed by Edwin Lutyens in 1893)

Significance

The Sidney Myer Memorial is of outstanding historical and aesthetic significance. It is one of only two new structures built in Australia to the design of the noted British architect, Sir Edwin Lutyens. Aesthetically, the integration of planting into the design of the structure is unusual in funerary architecture, whilst the structure itself is particularly elegant and austere.

Source

Andrew C Ward & Associates. *City of Box Hill Heritage and Conservation Study*. 1990.

Additional Historical Information

Box Hill Cemetery. National Trust of Australia Classification Report.

¹ Box Hill Cemetery. National Trust of Australia Classification Report.