



GSSA Cemetery Recording News

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Villiers Cemetery.

Recorded by
P. Holden in 1989, this
data has now been
typed and will be
included in CD2

Welcome

Welcome to the first edition of Cemetery Recording News. It is planned to make this a quarterly newsletter to keep everyone up to date on the progress and accomplishments of the Cemetery Recording Project. We are pleased to advise that this exciting project is moving ahead at a good pace at present. As will be seen we hope to bring you news from the branches, a Q&A section, a short story of 'Recording experiences' and various other information as it becomes available. The length of the newsletter will always only be limited by the contributions and/or Q&A received.

Cemetery Recording Project

The Cemetery Recording Project is a program whereby information of genealogical interest is recorded from headstones in those cemeteries which are, in particular, non-operational and/or do not possess a burial register. Often these smaller cemeteries are under severe threat.

The database is an index providing essential information for genealogical research and reference should always be made either to the original headstone or to the source document, which can be viewed by arrangement with the Society. In order to assist researchers in their task, other genealogical information from sources such as larger cemeteries, monuments and cremation memorials are now included in the Project scope; burial register data is also included in some cases, but it must not be assumed that the record for a particular cemetery includes a correlation between headstone and register data.

The Project is carried out under the auspices of the Genealogical Society of South Africa. Information is gathered by volunteers both from the branches of the Society, other interested organizations and individuals throughout the country.

Early Beginnings

The Cemetery Recording Project was started over 15 years ago when Peter Holden was doing his own family history research and realized that the headstones he recorded would not last forever. He was instrumental in setting up the project under the wings of the GSSA, and contributed many cemetery records – not only from small cemeteries that are especially under threat. Being in the theatrical profession, he was able to spend many days recording cemeteries in out of the way towns in South Africa. He built up a network of contributors, both from the various GSSA branches as well as individuals who were interested in preserving this information.

At the time, few computer systems existed which had the capacity to hold such a large database. Peter and the GSSA approached the National Archives for help and the headstone information has been stored in the GENE database for many years.

After the untimely death of Peter Holden in mid 1997, Peter and Beverley Moss took charge of the project's paperwork, listing all the records in the collection and expediting publication by the Archives in the so called blue books. At the same time, Johann Janse van Rensburg took over management of the project and made additional information available to the public on computer discs.

In 1999 Eric Swardt took over the management of the project, concentrating his efforts on improved publicity, leading to the collection of much more cemetery data via Internet sources. He also formulated and implemented standards and methodology for the conversion of the various earlier databases into a standard format for publication on CD.

Technology underwent a revolution since the start of the project. While computing power to handle such a database was in the hands of a few large corporations fifteen years ago, many households now have a PC that can handle a database ten times the size. Where nobody had the time and patience to sift through 40 volumes of cemetery registers to find ancestors, computers now enable us to find a name within seconds. Few had the resources to buy the whole set of cemetery registers in the hope of finding that ancestor. The National Executive Committee of the GSSA had the vision to utilize these technological advances to the benefit of the cemetery project.

Contributors and Volunteers

We wish to recognize all those contributors, volunteers and branches that give of their time to make the project a success. While it is not possible to list all the names of those involved, we wish to extend our sincere thanks for the work done. Whether it is in the form of recording cemetery data or capturing data from existing paper records, it all helps to make the project grow and be of benefit to genealogists countrywide. More volunteers are also needed to assist with the capture of existing paper records onto computer. Anyone who feels they are able to assist should contact the editor. Speed is not paramount, effort is.

Cemetery CD

We are privileged to have the assistance of a number of volunteers to help capture the existing high volume of paper records that are held by Peter and Beverley Moss. The work of capturing onto Excel spreadsheets for transfer into the greater database and then transferred to the Cemetery CD is both time consuming and difficult at times. The handwriting of some contributors is very challenging and takes some getting used to. The first edition has sold 150 copies so far. If anyone is interested in obtaining a copy, please contact Andre Heydenrych at (011) 804-6533 or e-mail aheydenr@mweb.co.za.

Good progress has been made since publication of the first volume of the Cemetery CD last year. While that CD had some 70,000 records, we are pleased to announce that the next edition will top the 100,000 mark.

GGSA Website Viewing

The change to access the GSSA website makes life easier for everyone. Just enter <http://www.ggsa.info> and then choose from the available tabs for information about just about anything in GSSA. Specifically it is interesting to visit the 'Projects' item where you can see the list of cemeteries that are on the current CD. Hold cursor over 'Projects', click on 'Cemetery Project', click on 'Cemetery Headstone Project' from the list and then on 'Summary'. The listing will download and open in Adobe Acrobat format.

Recording Experiences

"I am resigning; too little danger pay!

At last I got around to a little grave recording, and guess what we found? A swarm of honeybees! We left rather hurriedly, but not before we got the info"

Thanks to Alta Roux for recounting this experience of visiting Bosmanspan cemetery.

Branch Contributions/News

The Editor invites contributions from branches/individuals regarding their Cemetery Recording activities for inclusion in future editions of this newsletter. Please let us have updates on your projects that are listed on the GSSA website. Any information will be most welcome. To contribute please see 'Contacts' below for e-mail or postal addresses.

Johannesburg Branch

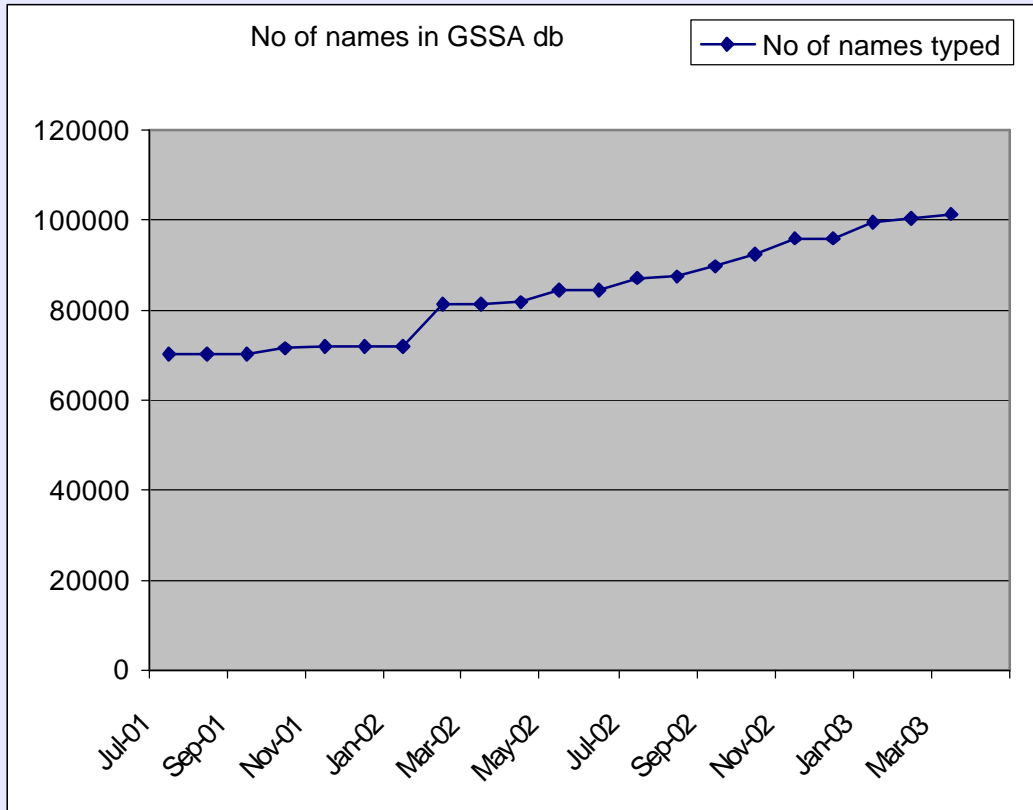
Johannesburg branch is currently involved with recording the old Krugersdorp Cemetery. Good progress has been made so far and further visits to complete the recording are planned.

Q & A Department

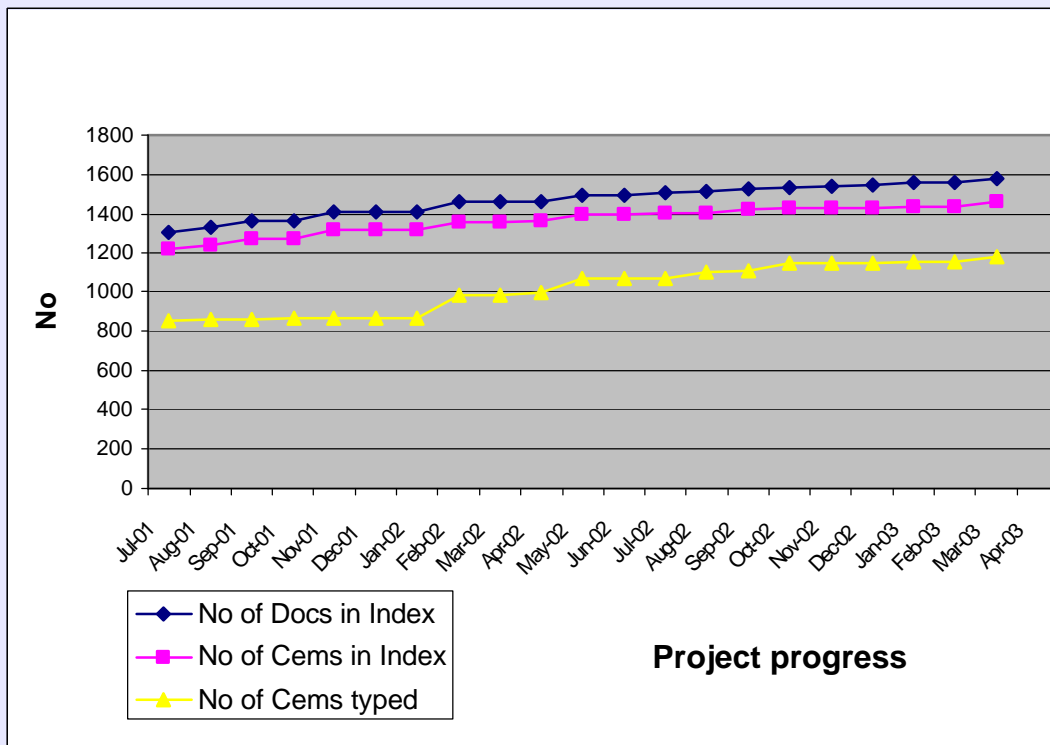
This section will be used for your Questions & Answers regarding any aspect of the Cemetery Recording Project. Please e-mail or write to the address in 'Contacts'. We will try to answer as many questions as possible in future editions of the Newsletter or by direct correspondence so as to assist everyone.

Statistics

It can be seen from the graphs below that progress has been constant in our efforts to increase the number of cemeteries and records on the system.



This graph illustrates progress from 70402 names in the first Cemetery CD issued last year to a position of 101419 names currently available for the updated CD to be made available shortly. The monthly trend over the last year is clearly seen.



This graph represents a comparison between documents and cemeteries in the main database. The difference between documents and cemeteries is attributable to revisions and updates of existing cemetery data. At this point in time there are 1456 cemeteries listed in the database. To date the data of 1182 cemeteries has been typed and will be included in the next CD leaving 274 cemeteries still to be typed and added to the system. Of the 274 there are however 16 known cemeteries whose data still has to be recorded.

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Feedback

Please feel free to submit comments/complaints/compliments/suggestions on this newsletter to the Editor. Your feedback is valuable to make future editions more interesting/worthwhile.

Editor's Note

All branch Presidents/Secretaries are asked to print/forward this e-mail to all interested persons. Should you prefer me to send directly to anyone, please let me have a list by return e-mail. Please note that the "Attachments" shown in that line are not accessible. Hopefully this will be sorted out for the next edition at end of June. It is my sincere endeavour to improve the quality of output as time progresses. Ongoing testing is planned.