

Dead and Buried but no longer Forgotten: The Interred at the Old Smithfield Cemetery, 1876-1915

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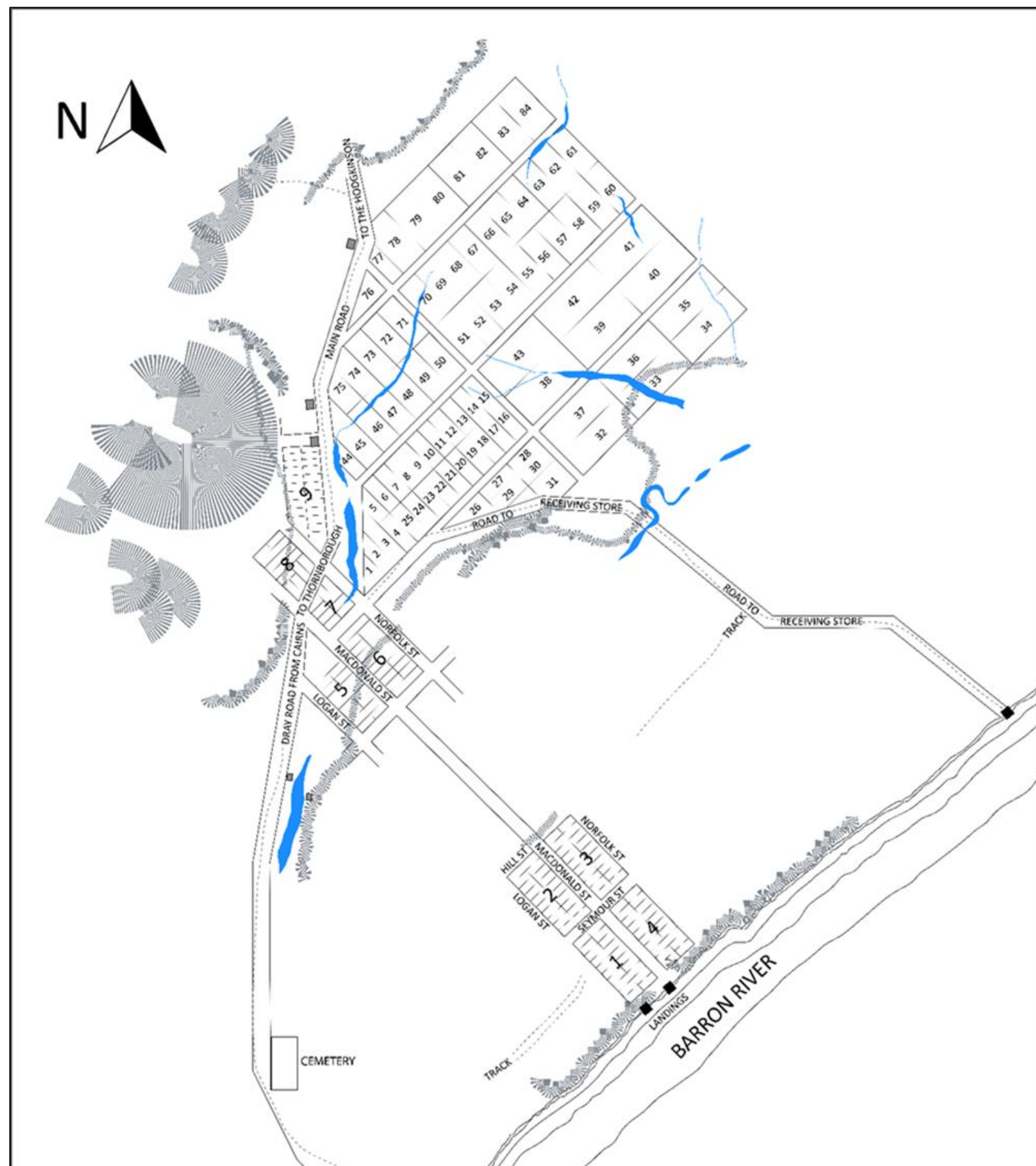


Figure 1: Composite of Smithfield Township and West Smithfield survey plans S199.1, S199.2, S199.3a, S199.3b, S199.4, and C157.314 (Queensland Department of Natural Resources).

This research sought to answer the question: How many burials occurred at the old Smithfield Cemetery?

The old Smithfield Cemetery is arguably the oldest extant cemetery in the Cairns region. It is situated on Stewart's Road, Caravonica, and lies approximately 800 metres west-south-west of the old Smithfield township site (Figure 1) (Queensland Government Gazette 1878:1287). The cemetery was established to service the short-lived township of Smithfield, 1876-1879, a riverine port on the Barron River that facilitated the movement of people and goods to the Hodgkinson goldfield via the nearby pack tracks and a dray road that traversed the coastal mountain range (Figure 2).

During the first year of European settlement at Trinity Bay (1876-1877), Smithfield eclipsed Cairns as the region's primary commercial centre. Therefore, given the township's former importance, the sparse funerary remains evident today at the Smithfield Cemetery of one unnamed grave and one nameless re-erected metal grave plaque prompted investigation of the old Smithfield Cemetery.

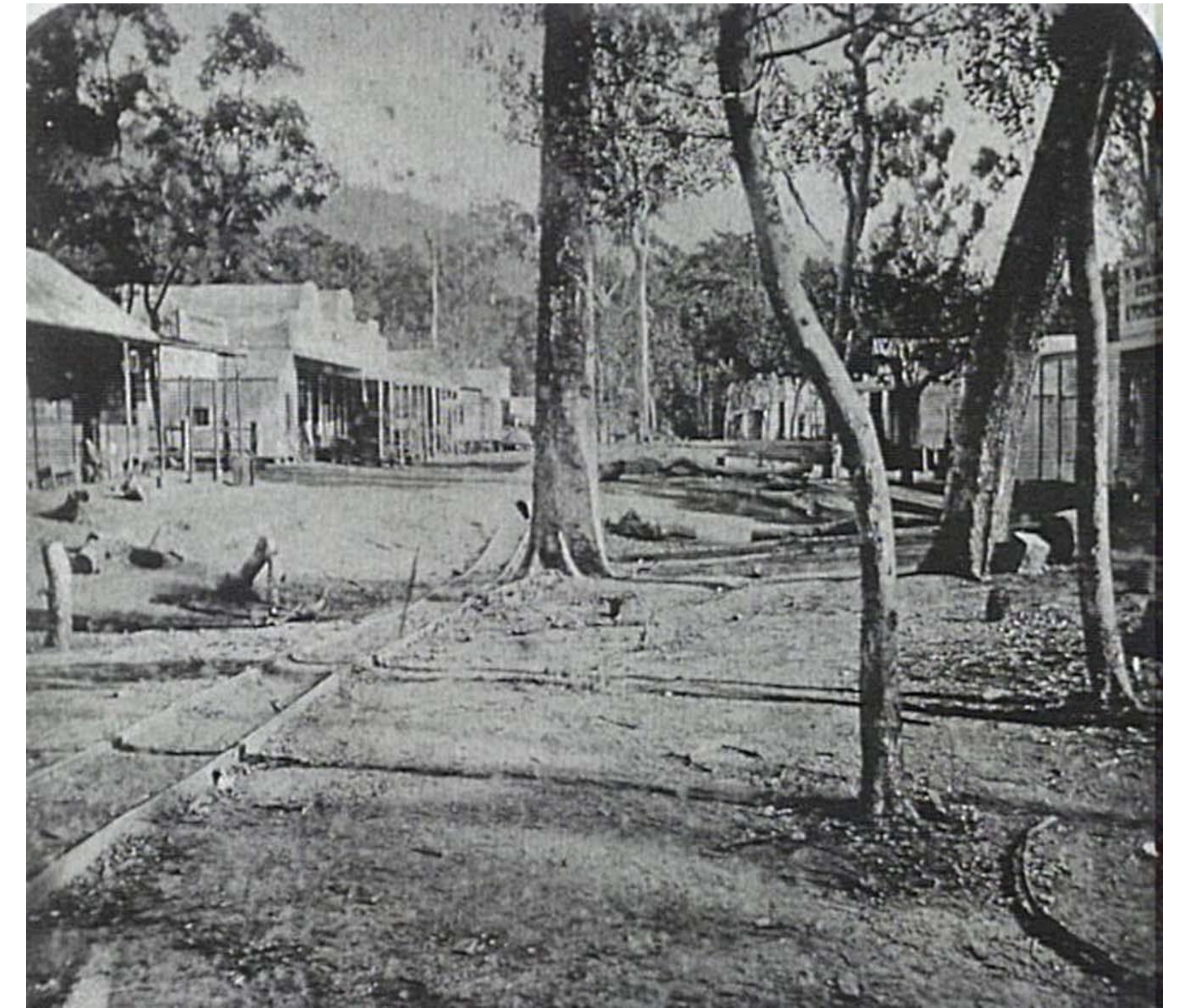


Figure 2: Smithfield township c.1877 (Cairns Historical Society P01070).

Methods: Newspaper articles, inquests, the Death Register for the District of Cook, and death certificates were consulted to collate information on deaths and burials that occurred at Smithfield. Genealogical research on the people buried at Smithfield was also conducted to provide context to their deaths and lives at Smithfield.

A geophysical survey using a Magnetic Gradiometer was conducted over the cemetery's current area of 0.6 acres (2,430m²), reduced from its original five acres (Figure 3) (Queensland Government Gazette 1878:1287). A Bartington Fluxgate Gradiometer, Grad601-2, was used to collect the magnetic gradiometer data. The instrument was set up to record data eight times per meter with 0.5 m spaced survey transects (16 samples/m²).

The geophysical survey area (GSA) covered almost all the cemetery boundaries, where feasible, and formed a 40 m x 70 m (2,800m²) grid. The southern boundary of the grid extended approximately 5 m beyond the current delineated southern boundary of the cemetery. The 40 m baseline was established parallel to the cemetery fence on the western side of the cemetery.

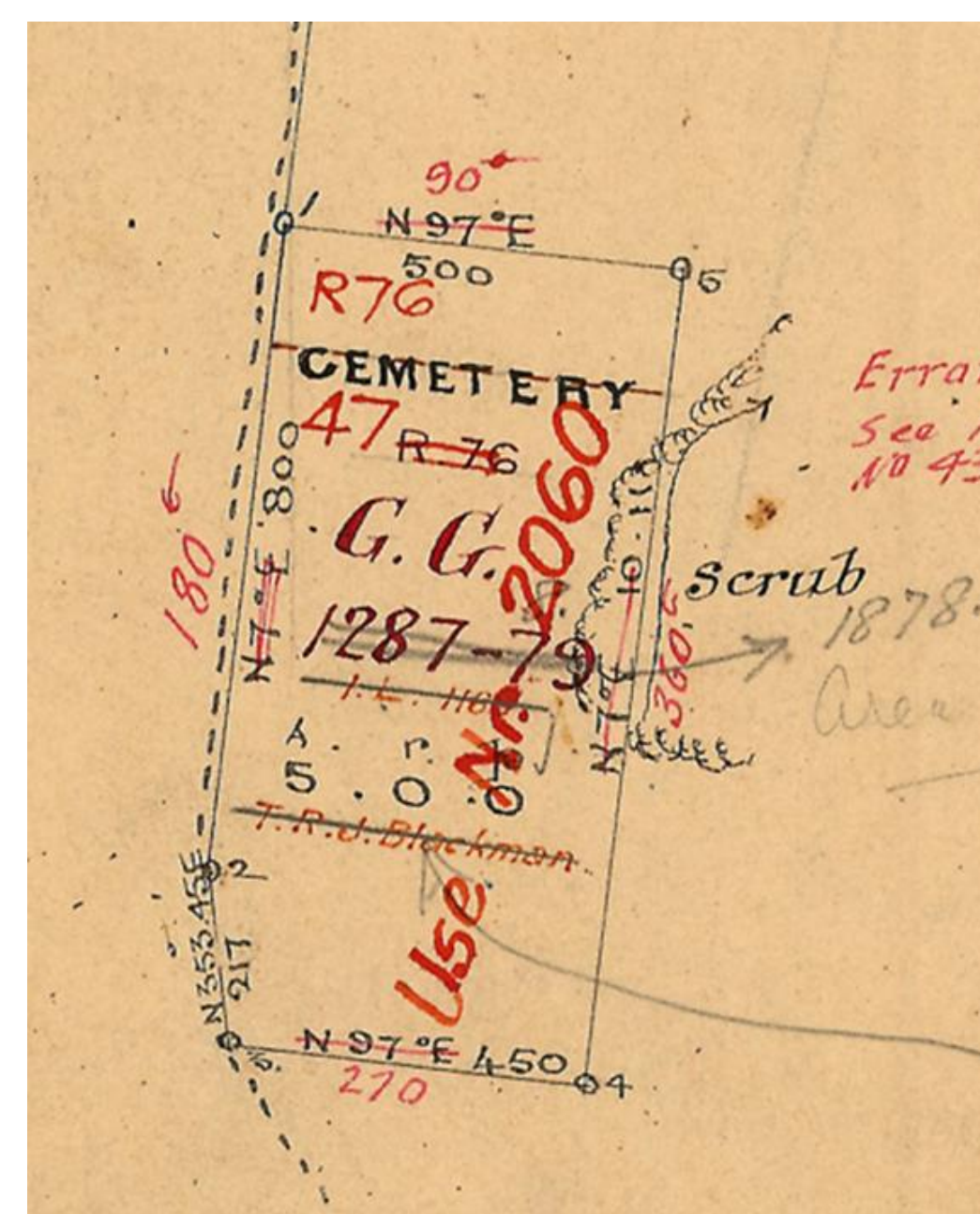


Figure 3: Frederick Warner's 1878 survey of the Smithfield cemetery reserve (QDNR C8.88).

Results: Archival research revealed that 24 people were buried at Smithfield Cemetery between 1877 and 1915: 16 male adults, 8 female adults and 8 children (5 female, 3 male) (see Table 1).

The 24 burials at Smithfield can be divided into two distinct groups which are separated by a hiatus of five years. The first group includes 14 burials that occurred during the lifetime of Smithfield township, and date from 1877-1878 (QSA ID2724094; 1878/C480). The second group includes 10 burials that occurred between 1883 and 1915 (1883/C900; 1915/C178). Six of the ten burials occurred in 1887 which correlates with the building of the Cairns to Herberton railway and increased habitation at nearby Barronville, later renamed Kamerunga.

The geophysical survey detected 15 potential graves based on their size (1 m x 2 m), magnitude, and distribution. These are in addition to the one extant grave (Figures 4-7). The 15 potential graves all follow a northwest by southeast orientation except one which lies north/south. The orientation deviates slightly from the traditional east/west orientation, but it is the same orientation as most of the burials at Cairns' MacLeod Street Cemetery, also gazetted in the late 1870s (Maxim Consulting Services Pty Ltd. 2012:18).



Figure 4: Magnetic gradiometer map overlaid on the aerial photo.



Figure 5: (Left) The cemetery's existing grave. Figure 6: (Right) A re-erected grave marker. Both are shown as yellow squares in Figure 7 (Collins 2019).

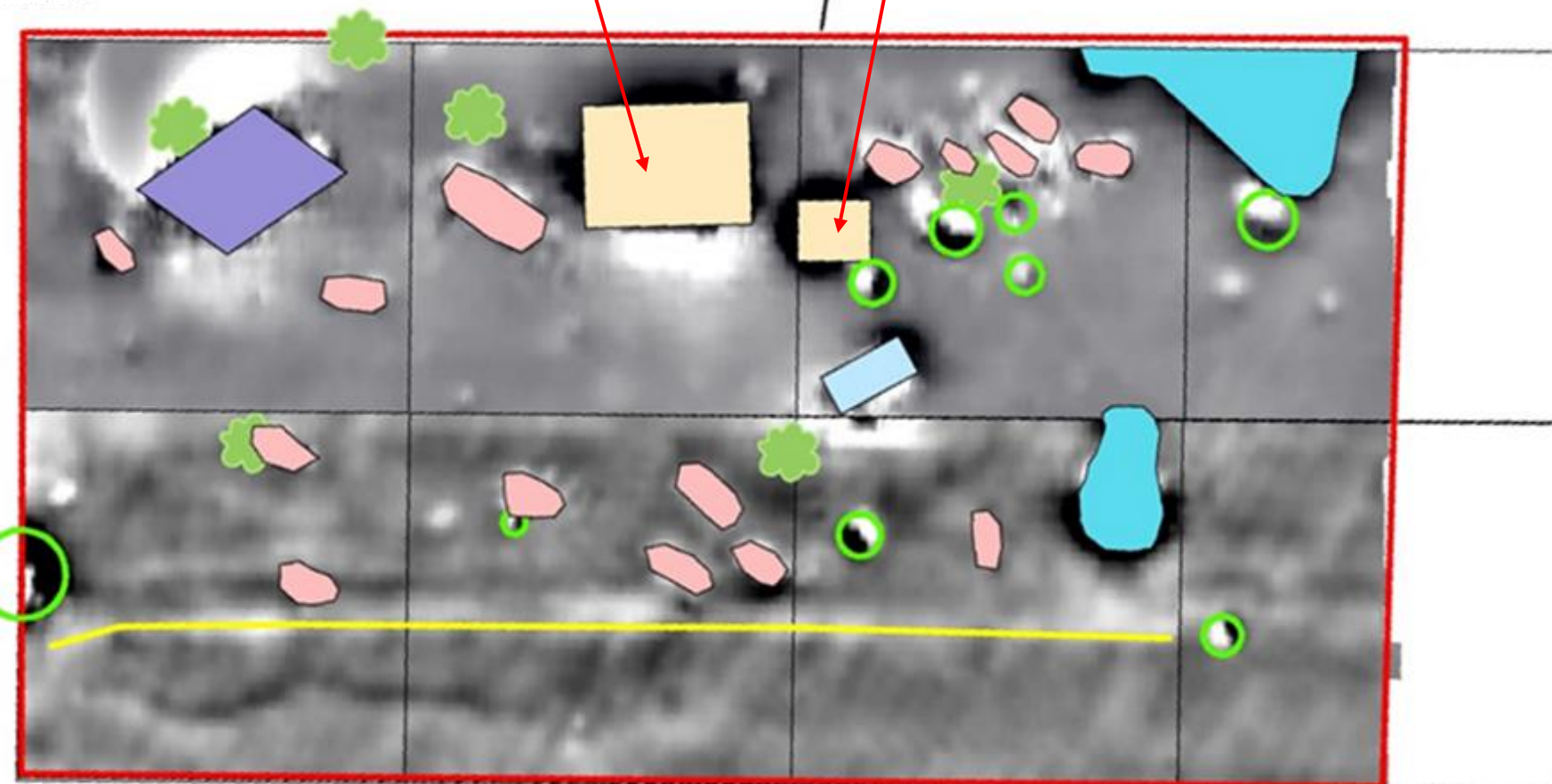


Figure 7: Magnetic gradiometer map showing the interpretations at the Smithfield Cemetery (see Legend). Pink shows potential burials.

Table 1: Deaths (n=26) at Smithfield and burials (n=24) at Smithfield/Smithfield Cemetery 1877-1915. Names with an asterisk were buried at Cairns.

Name	Sex	Died	Buried	Cause of Death/ Duration of illness	Nationality	Occupation	Age
Unknown (George Matthews)	M	April 1877	April 1877	Suspected crocodile attack	unknown	unknown	Adult
John McGrath	M	2.05.1877	May 1877	Blow to the head whilst sparring	unknown	Sawyer	Adult
Mary Gernox	F	8.05.1877	8.05.1877	Fever (21 days)	Australian	Infant	2 years
Benjamin Simmond	M	27.05.1877	28.05.1877	Unknown, 'Found dead'	unknown	unknown	Adult
James Cummings	M	14.07.1877	15.07.1877	Intermittent Fever (4 weeks)	unknown	Mining manager	58 years
Nicholas Lobeth	M	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	Adult
Ernestine Hingst	F	6.08.1877	7.08.1877	Fever (6 weeks)	Prussian	unknown	36 years
Eugene Sierakowski	M	unknown	unknown	unknown	Polish	unknown	late 50s
Robert Jackson Craig*	M	26.12.1877	27.12.1877	Murdered - gunshot	Scottish	Merchant	33 years
William Smith	M	26.12.1877	27.12.1877	Suicide - gunshot	English	Publican	55 years
John McGillon	M	7.02.1878	11.02.1878	Drowned in Barron River	Irish	Timber getter	32 years
Ellen Koch*	F	6.04.1878	7.04.1878	Jungle Fever	Irish	Wife	abt 45 years
Maria MacDonald	F	2.05.1878	3.05.1878	Inflammation of intestines (2 days)	Australian	Wife and mother	30 years
William Emmett	M	13.05.1878	14.05.1878	Fever (6 weeks)	unknown	Sawyer	45 years
Christopher Kelly	M	18.05.1878	19.05.1878	Convulsions	Australian	child	7 yrs 8 months
Rebecca Crossland	F	16.11.1878	17.11.1878	Convulsions (6 days)	Australian	Infant	11 days
William James Le Grande	M	12.11.1883	13.11.1883	Convulsions	Australian	Infant	8 days
Bertha Helena Richter	F	5.03.1887	6.03.1887	Convulsions	Australian	Infant	8 months 6 days
Kate Barry	F	16.06.1887	unknown	unknown	Australian	Infant	23 days
Beatrice Ryan	F	19.06.1887	unknown	unknown	Australian	Infant	4 months
Martin Connolly	M	21.06.1887	unknown	Blow during boxing match	unknown	unknown	49 years
Frederick Condon	M	22.06.1887	unknown	Haemorrhage from laceration of the liver	unknown	Laborer	abt 37 years
John Willoughby	M	18.07.1887	unknown	Blasting accident on Range railway	unknown	unknown	36 years
Robert Joseph Sullivan	M	20.09.1887	unknown	unknown	unknown	Infant	1 year 5 months
Louis Kopp	M	13.07.1893	14.07.1893	Rheumatic fever	German	Farmer	65 years
Martha Hudson	F	10.01.1915	10.01.1915	Intercranial haemorrhage	unknown	unknown	49 years

Discussion: The archival and geophysical data sets, together with the cemetery's one existing grave, mean that 16 burials can be physically accounted for out of the 24 documented burials. This leaves 8 burials unaccounted for. The shortfall may be due to magnetic interference from several metal features within the surveyed area of the cemetery, such as an interpretative sign, an existing grave, a bench seat and fencing, which could have masked other grave-like anomalies. Alternatively, the limited size of the geophysical survey, less than a fifth of the cemetery's original area, means that other burials potentially exist outside of today's cemetery boundary.

Conclusion: The geophysical survey's new findings correlate well with the documentary evidence and dispel the previously held belief that only one burial had occurred at the cemetery. Furthermore, this research supports the likelihood that the old Smithfield Cemetery was the only burial ground in the Smithfield township area.

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 Cairns Regional Council.

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