TEACHER RESOURCE – THE AUSTRALIAN COLONIES

Colonial Western Australian History –
Study of the Swan River Colony 1827 to 1890s

TEACHER RESOURCE 4

EAST PERTH CEMETERIES: SOCIAL CLASS IN THE COLONY

The Swan River Colonial society was based on rules patterned in England.

People with money and family connections believed they were part of the gentry or upper class.

Ownership of land was highly valued in British society and the prospect of cheap land drew many to the Colony. The migrants brought money, possessions and servants with them to the colony.

This ownership of land was to create wealth — through farming crops or grazing animals. Fences, shelter for feed, sheds, ploughs, boats, tools and new plants and stock were all required to improve the land.

Some families like the Mongers at York, the Shentons at Greenough and the Hardeys at Peninsula Farm became prosperous citizens of the colony.

Others like Alexander John Piesse, Peter Broun and John Septimus Roe held positions of power and authority in the Colony.

Cemeteries reflect the wealth and influence of families in the colony. Many names of streets, suburbs and towns across Perth and Western Australia originated from these families.

There were also many graves for the poorer people in the colony. Wealthy immigrants often paid for servants to accompany them. These indentured servants were often among the working class in the Colony. Why might they not be seen today?

The Monger Family vault (pictured right) is made of marble and reflects their wealth. A smaller plot will also reflect social class in the colony.

There is only one grave for an Aboriginal person – Tommy Dower (you will visit his gravestone on the Cemeteries Trail). Why weren’t there more graves for the first Australians?

Convicts, the “unwilling immigrants” to the Colony, as well as free migrants who came in search of gold often remained as members of the working class or improved their status by hard work in the Colony.