

UNKNOWN PIONEERS

SPICER'S GAP CAIRN.

Historic Cemetery Nearly Lost.

A cemetery that might have been lost—carrying with it into oblivion its scanty remnant of romantic history—and fast fading opportunities to discover more about a picturesque phase in the life of the country—Thoughts of these possibilities will be brought to the minds of many people by recent renovation at Spicer's Gap of a tall cairn, anonymously built by a lover alike of the beauty of nature there, the fragrance of the old stories of the discovery of the Gap, and the history clinging about the busy pioneer settlement of the early '60's.

Like the old rough track that passed through the Gap to the other side of the Range, that settlement has disappeared; and to-day, beside the bitumen road which now marks traffic's complete conquest of the mountain, the tumbling ovens of a bakery are the only indication that a pioneering centre once stood there, except for a sadder and more significant token—the traces of a cemetery. The history of the settlement goes back over a century into Australia's most romantic days. When Cunningham was seeking a way across the Range in 1828, he had with him a man named Harry Alphen, who discovered Spicer's Gap just at the time when the one which now bears the name of his leader was found. The latter, however, was found to be too difficult for the horses, and so it was that Spicer's was accepted as the route. Alphen had the foresight to see that business would come to anyone settled on the mountain, and so it was that he established his little group of enterprises. He chose a marvellous spot to do it. Two miles from the foot of the mountain, where the forest merges into beautiful scrub, a clearing was made, and an hotel, a blacksmith shop, and a bakery were built.

SILENCE OF THE GRAVES.

The pity is, however, that little record can be found to-day of the inhabitants of that place, and that its history has crumbled in memory as the old buildings, which must have held wonderful stories, crumbled in that clearing. So it is, too, that the lonely graves indeed hold their secret. No fewer than 12 or 13 of these resting places have been found, but the names of those who sleep there amidst the quiet and beauty of nature are known possibly in only two or three cases. To-day only one or two of the graves can be found out of the three rows that are there amongst the tall trees, and one definitely identified is that of Mrs. Collins, which is

the tall trees, and one definitely identified is that of Mrs. Collins, which is marked by four leaning posts. Her death, before 1860, was most tragic. The woman, known as Mother Collins, was riding down from the Gap on a wool dray when, at a pinch a little below the settlement, she was jolted to the ground. Her neck was broken, and she was buried in the now historic cemetery. The victim and the tragedy ever will be remembered, because that spot on the road to this day bears the name, "Mother Collins's Pinch." It also seems probable that a Mr. Cox also lies there, for it is understood that his widow, who now is 91 years of age, and lives at Roma, has spoken of his burial at the Gap.

MYTHS GROW.

For the rest, however, the greatest uncertainty exists, and this has given rise to myths. How little is known is emphasised by the fact that some people say that a tiny grave beside that of Mother Collins is her child's, while others argue that she had no baby. Then there is a story of a jockey who was killed and was interred at Alphen's settlement. There is a strong possibility that a horseman called Hudson is the occupant of one of the graves. Moss's Well, or The Springs, situated about a mile and a half above the settlement, also is known as Hudson's Luck as a result of a story that the horseman, affected by fever, struggled to the well, and was found dead there next day. One thing seems certain, and that is that Alphen himself did not find his rest there, for it has been said that he came to Ipswich from the Gap, and conducted a business on a spot approximately where Mr. J. C. Minnie's shop to-day stands. No other information has been gathered about those quiet graves, though residents in the locality have been living there for the last 60 or so years.

CAIRN'S TRIBUTE.

That the pioneers who laboured there will not be forgotten, however, has been assured by one or two Ipswich visitors who, anxious that the cemetery, and its valuable link with the early history of Australia, should not be lost, and that those who lie there should be respected for the part they played, went to the spot, cleared it, and erected a rugged cairn. The cemetery is about 10 chain from the main road, and, though not very prominent, it and the cairn may be seen from that distance by passers-by. The memorial, which stands at Mother Collins' grave, has a foundation about 18in. deep, is about 8ft. square at the bottom, and tapers to the top, which is 12ft. from the ground. It is made of flat stones found in the vicinity, and cement was brought from Ipswich. In this rough structure has been placed a tablet with its message of beauty and tribute:

THIS CAIRN IS RAISED

To the Memory
of the Unknown Pioneers
Who Sleep here
Till the Day Break

WHO SLEEP HERE

Till the Day Break

And the Shadows Flee Away.

The tablet is of concrete, and the wording was done with use of tacks. Copper topped ones were arranged for the big letters at the opening, and brass sprigs were used for the remainder. All were placed in position as the concrete was setting. The tacks then were enamelled to preserve them from the weather.