

Other Names	N/A	
Street Address	Gayndah-Mount Perry Road	Byrnestown
Title Details/ GPS Coordinates	150MCK37130 (Cemetery), 2MZ1072, 1RP22788, 7MCK37130, 108MZ443, 149MCK37130	

Historical Context

Byrnestown Commune was one of a number of co-operative communities established under the Queensland Co-operative Communities Land Settlement Act 1893. The objective of the Act was to establish communes for the working class based in particular on the ideas of the Queensland utopian, William Lane (who established a utopian commune in Paraguay in 1893 called 'New Australia'). Under the Act, a minimum of thirty native-born or naturalised men were required before the commune could be established and a lease of up to sixty-five hectares provided to each member. Once the initial conditions were met, the Government provided £20 per member to buy food, tools and stock. Women were not allowed to become members in their own right and could only join a commune as part of a family. Three communes were established in the Burnett region: Byrnestown, Resolute (adjacent to Byrnestown, to the east) and Bon Accord (near Ideraway, close to Gayndah and on the banks of Barambah Creek).

The Byrnestown communal settlement was registered on 24 February 1894. The settlement was named after The Honourable Thomas Joseph Byrnes, Queensland Attorney General and the most senior Roman Catholic in the government at the time. In March 1894, six single men and twenty-eight families, a total of 175 individuals, settled on 1,900 hectares on Wetheron Creek. Conditions were difficult, as the settlers were forced to live in basic accommodation whilst enduring a cold and wet winter. Nonetheless, crops were soon planted and a Provisional School was opened in September 1895, which catered for children from the Byrnestown commune, as well as the nearby Resolute commune.

The communal experiment was short-lived. To support the group financially, half of the men undertook work in the sugar industry around Childers while their families remained in the community. According to the group's statutes, all earnings were the property of the commune. The majority of the members had no experience in communal work and lacked the spirit of co-operation and a bitter dispute erupted regarding private and communal money, distribution of supplies and the management of the commune in general. A serious rift developed in the community and several members left or were expelled. The Queensland government determined that the communes were unsuccessful and introduced amendments to the Act in 1895 that extinguished the communes' land titles, cancelled all communal rights and obligations and returned all land and assets to the Crown. The Byrnestown commune formally ceased to exist on 23 December 1895, although sixteen former community members remained in the area on individually selected properties.

On 12 May 1894, Margaret Matthews, a three months old baby, died of pneumonia and was buried on a stony ridge a short distance from the camp. Margaret was the first recorded death in the Byrnestown commune. Her burial formed the nexus of the commune's cemetery and the burial ground was subsequently officially gazetted as the Byrnestown Cemetery.

Physical Description

The Byrnestown Commune and Cemetery is located adjacent to the Gayndah-Mount Perry Road. The location of the former commune consists of a cleared paddock; the commune buildings were located along the banks of Wetheron Creek. The cemetery is located in the north east of the former settlement on approximately two hectares of cleared bushland on a ridge, bordering onto the road in the north. The slightly sloped site features native grasses and some trees and shrubs and is surrounded by a post and four wire fence. Access is through a wide metal gate with wrought iron feature suspended between two timber posts with square profile featuring decorative tops. The graves are located in the northern part of the site divided into three sections in the east, west and centre and are arranged in rows. Grave surrounds include concrete, wrought iron and metal pipes structures. There are a variety of grave markers including metal stakes and concrete plaques. Memorials feature headstones of varying shapes, materials and conditions, including crosses, tiered ornaments, memorial plaques on oblique concrete bases and a cairn. The location of the cemetery on a ridgeline provides an excellent view over the site of the former commune.

Integrity	Good	Condition	Fair
Statutory Listings	No statutory listings		
Non-Statutory Listings	No non-statutory listings		
Inspection Date	07/09/2012		

References

Metcalfe, B, 1998, The Gayndah Communes, Central Queensland University Press.
www.archives.qld.gov.au/Researchers/Exhibitions/Top150/076-100/125Items/item-doc-img-090.jpg

Heritage Significance	
Criteria	Definition
A	<i>The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the region's history.</i>
Statement	The Byrnestown Cemetery and Commune is important in demonstrating the evolution of the region's history, particularly as the region was the focus of the significant government-sanctioned social experiment of co-operative communities in Queensland in the 1890s. It is also important in demonstrating the pattern of the region's history, particularly the promotion of agrarian ideals in the Burnett region.

C	<i>The place has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the region's history.</i>
Statement	The Byrnestown Cemetery and Commune has the potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the region's history, particularly burial practices, which illustrate the religious and cultural patterns of settlement and life in the district, and archaeological material associated with life in the commune.

E	<i>The place is important to the region because of its aesthetic significance</i>
Statement	The Byrnestown Cemetery and Commune is important to the region because of its aesthetic significance, as it demonstrates evocative qualities of a harsh, simple and isolated life in rural Queensland in the late 1800s, particularly as the cemetery is located on a stony ridge, which overlooks the site of the Byrnestown commune and the surrounding rural setting.

G	<i>The place has a strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons important to the region.</i>
Statement	The Byrnestown Cemetery and Commune has a special association with the Byrnestown community, especially as members of the commune continued to live in the region after the commune was disbanded, as well as their descendants.

Location Map

