

The Pride of the Yarra Steamboat Collision



Photo of Otago Harbour taken from the location of the commemorative plaque at Port Chalmers.



The Sinking of the Pride of the Yarra

In Dunedin's Southern Cemetery
three beautiful celtic crosses
can be found in neighboring
graves.

The graves are linked by a
common disaster.

What happened?

What is the story behind
these crosses?

The story is written in stone

We can find out more by visiting the graves and reading the headstones.

The tall Celtic cross bears four marble plaques that commemorate the deaths of the Rev. Thomas Campbell and his wife Marian, their five children and their two servants who were all drowned on the Pride of the Yarra in Otago Harbour in 1863.



THIS FAMILY
WAS DROWNED ON THE
PRIDE OF THE YARRA
IN OTAGO HARBOUR
ON 4TH JULY 1863
AFTER A SAFE VOYAGE
FROM ENGLAND.

THEIR CHILDREN
EDWARD BABINGTON
AGED 5.
DUNCAN ERNEST
AGED 4.
MURIEL AGNES
AGED 2½.
LILIAS MARIAN
AGED 1½.
ALFRED
AGED 6 MONTHS.

REV. T. HEWITT
CAMPBELL
FIRST RECTOR OF
THE HIGH SCHOOL
AGED 34.
ALSO HIS WIFE
MARIAN
AGED 27.

AND THEIR DEVOTED SERVANTS
SARAH ROBERTS
AND FENNY FINCH

The story written in stone

This inscription has
weathered badly so
that it now cannot
be read. We need to
go to older records
to find out what it
once said...

*Fanny Finch
Aged 17
Servant of the Rev.
T. H. Campbell
Drowned
in the same
steamboat collision
4 July 1863*



The inscription
reads...

*Sarah Roberts
Aged 23
Servant of the Rev.
T. H. Campbell
Drowned
in the same
steamboat collision
4 July 1863*



Another story in stone

Not far from the Campbell family and servants graves, the grave of another victim of the collision can be found - Charles Sommerville.

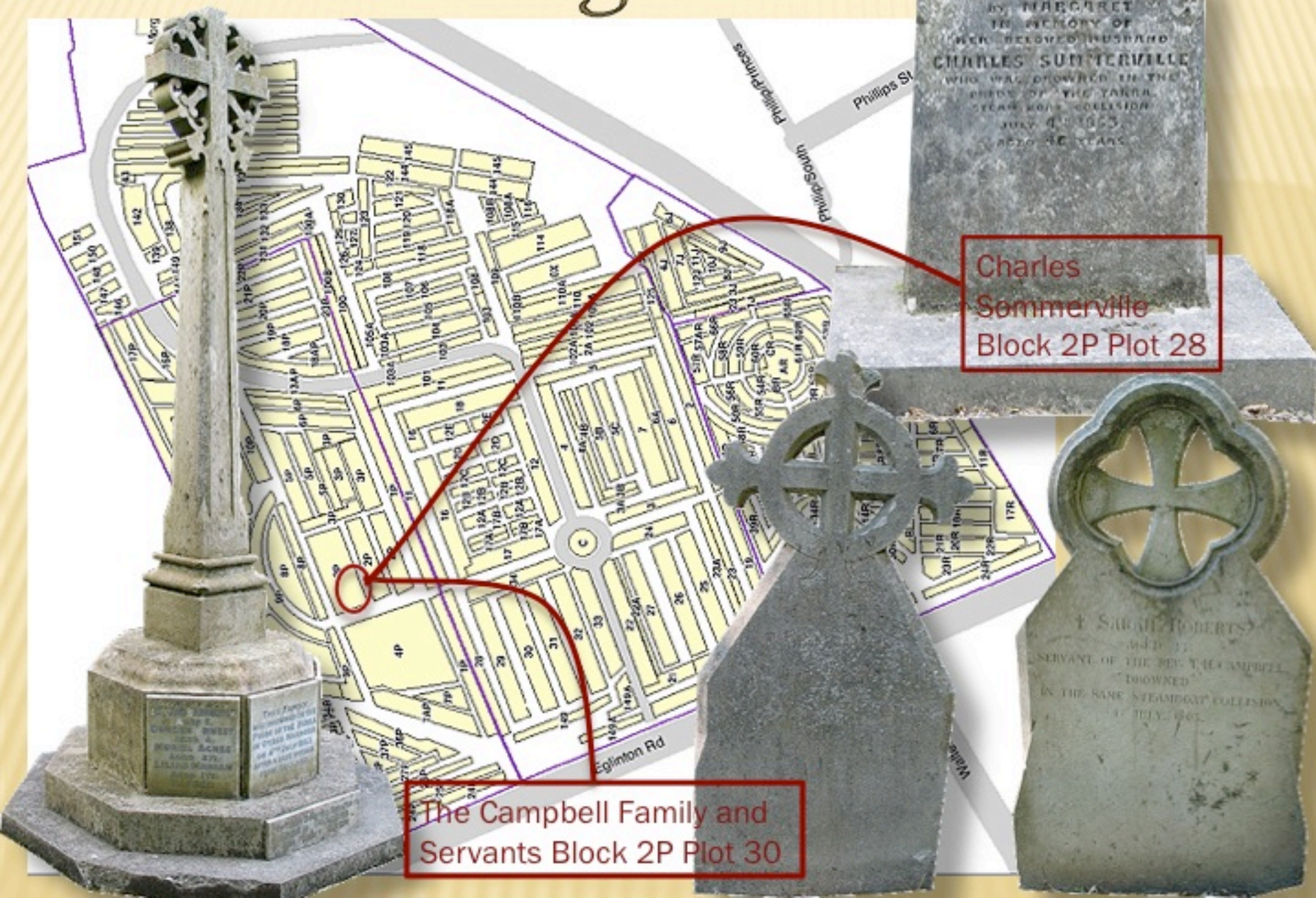
The inscription reads...

*Erected
by Margaret
in memory of
her beloved husband
Charles Sommerville
Who was drowned in the
Pride of the Yarra
steamboat collision
July 4th 1863
Aged 46 years*

A further victim was noted in the newspapers of the time to be buried close by but there is no headstone.



Location of the graves



What happened 1?

The Rev. Thomas Campbell was the newly appointed Principal (or Rector) of the Otago Boys' High School. He had just arrived in Port Chalmers with his very young family of five children aged 5 and less (Alfred, just 6 weeks old, had been born on the voyage to New Zealand) and two young servants after a 3 month trip from England.

In 1863 there was no road from Port Chalmers to Dunedin and ships were unable to sail up the harbour to Dunedin. Small steamboats provided a regular service ferrying passengers from Port Chalmers to Dunedin.

On Saturday July 4th the Rev. and Mrs. Campbell had travelled from Port Chalmers to Dunedin to organise their affairs in preparation for bringing their family to Dunedin. They returned to the ship later that afternoon and loaded some luggage and the family on board the *Pride of the Yarra*.

The evening was clear but cold and the family huddled in the small forward cabin below deck, with about 17 or 18 other people. In all there were an estimated 40 – 50 people on board that travelled towards Dunedin from Port Chalmers.

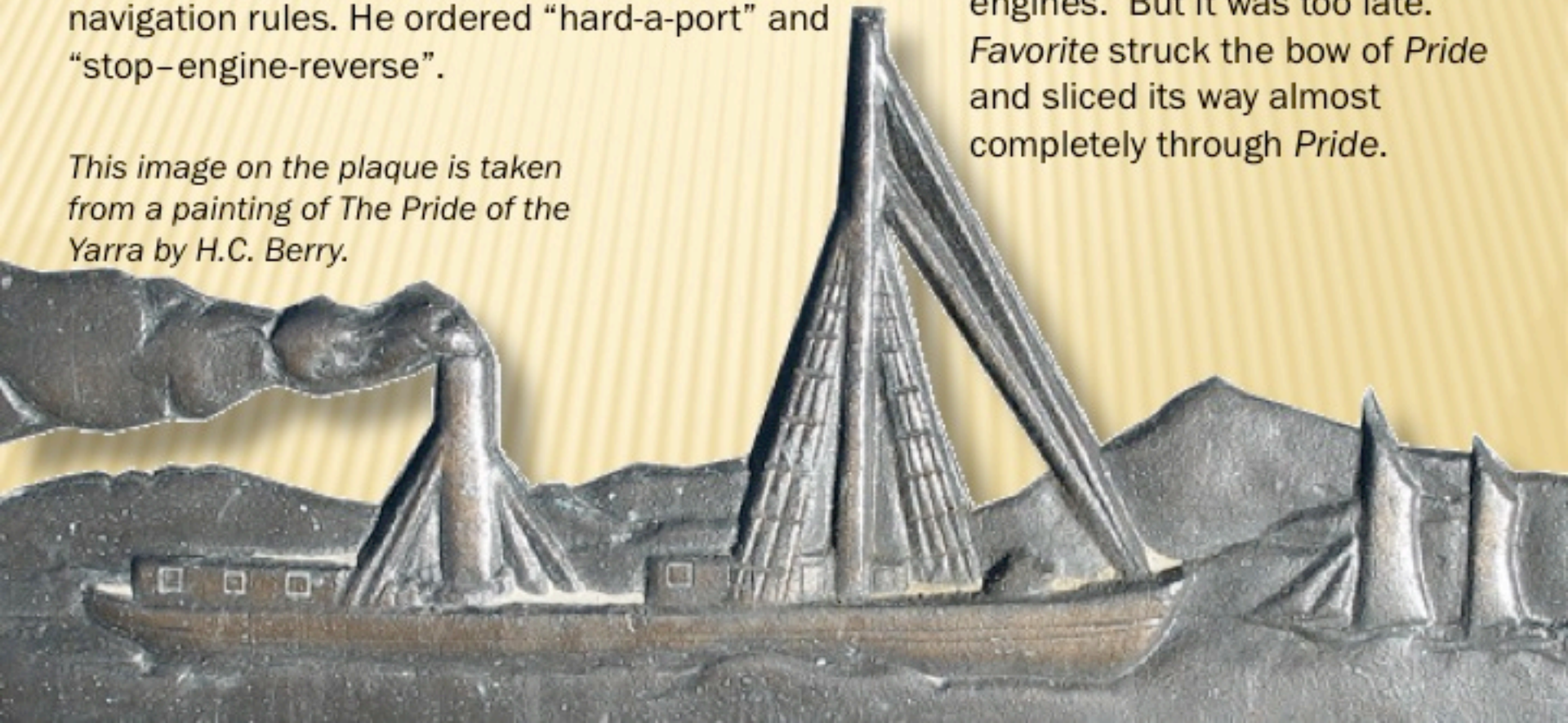
The *Favorite* was another small paddle steamer plying the Otago Harbour and on this evening she was coming in the opposite direction from Dunedin on her usual run.

What happened 2?

The crew of the *Pride of the Yarra* had seen the lights of the *Favorite* approaching for some distance, as expected, but Captain Spence became alarmed when the *Favorite* did not turn or give way as was expected by navigation rules. He ordered “hard-a-port” and “stop-engine-reverse”.

This image on the plaque is taken from a painting of The Pride of the Yarra by H.C. Berry.

When the crew of *Favorite* did see the *Pride* they were only 20 metres away and they turned the *Favorite* “hard-a-port” in desperation and stopped the engines. But it was too late. *Favorite* struck the bow of *Pride* and sliced its way almost completely through *Pride*.



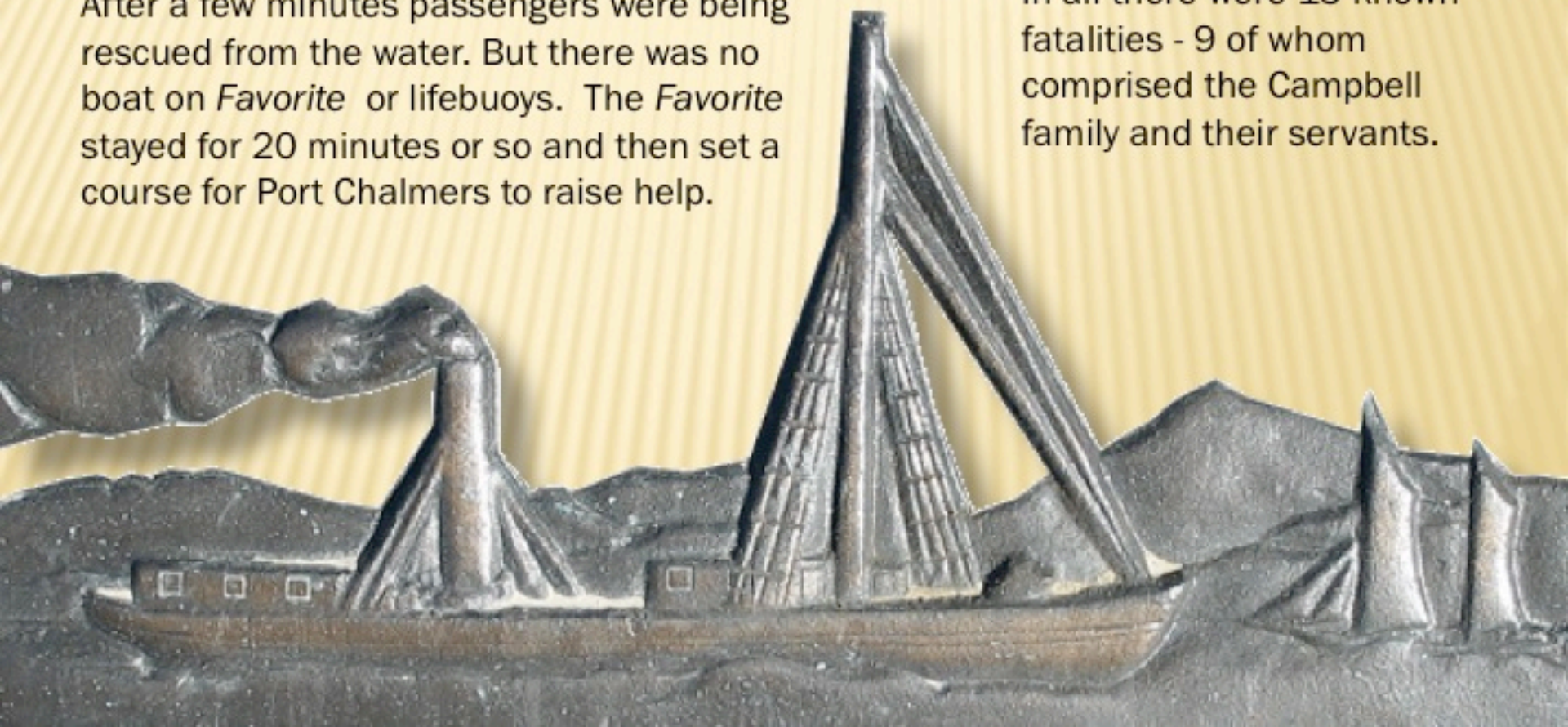
What happened 3?

The deck passengers picked themselves up after the impact and raced towards the bows to grab at the rails of *Favorite* and clamber aboard as *Pride* was sinking fast.

Those in the cabin had no forewarning prior to the impact. It was hard to escape from the powerful inrush of water into the cabin.

After a few minutes passengers were being rescued from the water. But there was no boat on *Favorite* or lifebuoys. The *Favorite* stayed for 20 minutes or so and then set a course for Port Chalmers to raise help.

In all there were 13 known fatalities - 9 of whom comprised the Campbell family and their servants.



A Huge Public Funeral

The funeral was held at 1.30pm on Thursday 9th July at St Paul's Church in the Octagon. (This is not the church we see today. The church was later replaced with St Paul's Cathedral built in 1915).

The commissioner of police formed a mounted and foot-constable guard. Large crowds stood "mute and sorrowful" as the coffins were carried out of the Provincial Hotel where the inquest was held.

A hymn was sung at the service from the hymn books that the Rev Campbell had brought with him from England and had left with the church on his first visit.

A procession of about 2000 people stretched for over a kilometre as it followed the hearses down Princess Street to the Southern Cemetery.

The monument that now stands on top of the grave was brought out from England in 1864. The octagonal base originally had eight porcelain plaques – one for each family member and one telling the story. These plaques have been replaced with the four marble panels shown in slide 3.

The school opened less than one month later on August 3 1863 with Mr. G.P Abram acting as Rector.

Photo Caption:
The Head Prefect of Otago Boys' High School Bernard Lunn lays a wreath at the grave of the Rev. T Hewitt Campbell, first Rector of the school who was drowned in Otago Harbour on July 4 1863 while coming up from Port Chalmers to take up his post on the first day of his appointment. The grave is in the Southern Cemetery and the rest of the prefects attended the ceremony.

In remembrance 1

The loss of the school's first principal in such tragic circumstances has never been forgotten by the School.



This photograph, with the caption at left, was first published in The Evening Star, Saturday August 3, 1963, p.2. Reproduced with permission from the Otago Daily Times.

In remembrance 2

Kilgour's Point



In 2003 a memorial plaque was set in place at Port Chalmers at a point where there is a view down the harbour towards Kilgour's point where the collision happened.

