

SACRED

IN THE MEMORY OF
CATHERINE THOMPSON
MIDWIFE (LATE OF ABERDEEN)
WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE
14TH DECEMBER 1881
AGED 33 YEARS

ALSO HER SON
JOSEPH
LATE OF PALMERS ON
WHO DIED 19TH NOVEMBER 1880
AGED 28 YEARS

ALSO
EFFIE JEAN AND RUSSELL
THOMPSON
ACCIDENTALLY DROWNED AT
ROSLYN MARCH 10TH 1917
AGED 1 AND 8 YEARS

AND THEY SHALL BE MINE SAITH
THE LORD OF HOSTS: IN THAT
DAY WHEN I MAKE UP MY JEWELS

ALSO
JOHN NORMAN THOMPSON
BORN 10TH OCT 1859 DIED 1917
AGED 58 YEARS

The words on the tombstone “accidentally drowned” caught my eye and led to the uncovering of this tragic story.

The Otago Daily Times carried a long double column report on the drowning.

On March 10, 1917 two little children were drowned under very sad circumstances in one of the dams on the property of Messrs Ross and Glendining in the Kakorai Valley on Saturday morning. There are three dams on the property and it seems that children going to play there, and particularly to catch frogs, have caused those in charge a considerable amount of trouble and no little anxiety.

The two children drowned, Effie Jean Thompson, aged 11 years, and Russell Thompson, aged 8 years, went away on Saturday morning about 9 am, in company with a little fellow named John Sutherland, aged 7 years, to gather mushrooms, and evidently visited the lagoon with the object of catching frogs. They took off their boots and stockings and began wading about. What followed next no-one is sure, but the boy must have fallen or got out of his depth, and his little sister heroically went to his assistance, with the result that both were drowned. The little boy Sutherland seems to have got frightened at seeing the children struggling in the water, and ran off to the house of Mr Thompson about a mile away. When he arrived there, and said they had drowned, he was initially disbelieved, but eventually Mr Thompson got on his bike and went to investigate. He was unable to find the children as the water was very dirty and the sides dangerously steep, but he picked up their little school bag in which were their stockings and boots.

The police shortly after recovered the bodies from about the middle of the dam where the water was about 16 to 20 feet deep.

Robert Cassels Glendining (manager for the company) told the Coroner’s Inquest that the dam was on the company’s private property, which was fenced but it was easy enough for anyone to get through the fence, and the lower dam was fenced but children got through the fence.

Mother, father and the surviving boy all gave tragic testimony to the enquiry.

The Coroner’s verdict was that the children were accidentally drowned. He recommended that the firm take into serious consideration the fencing of the dam so that children of tender years could not reach it.

The two children are buried in the family grave in Dunedin’s Southern Cemetery.

Prepared by the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand (www.cemeteries.org.nz) from information from the PapersPast website.