

BRIGID MAGNER

‘He didn’t pay his rent!’ Commemorating Adam Lindsay Gordon in Brighton

The poet Adam Lindsay Gordon enjoyed a certain cult status from his death by suicide, in 1870, until the mid 20th century.¹ Until Henry Lawson’s death, in 1922, the extensive number of monuments and memorials to Gordon was without precedent in Australian literary history.² A dashing figure and an accomplished horseman, Gordon provided a bridge between Romantic poetry and local bush poetry, demonstrating the right combination of grand lineage, sophistication and derring-do to be celebrated as an Australian icon. He was considered a ‘second Byron’ and the unofficial poet laureate of Australia by his devotees.

Born in the Azores, Gordon was a resident of the Cotswolds in Gloucestershire, before migrating to Australia. He lived first in South Australia and then in Victoria, residing in Brighton, Melbourne, for only 18 months before committing suicide there. Brighton became the final resting place for the peripatetic poet, prompting a number of tributes to him. This article explores the significance of Gordon commemorations to Australian literary culture, with a special focus on Brighton ‘pilgrimages’ – a term used loosely in relation to Gordon, encompassing a whole range of activities, from poetic recitations to graveside tributes.

The terms ‘pilgrim’ and ‘pilgrimage’ are part of the common language of literary tourism, which emerged in medieval Europe. As Ian Ousby has noted, since the Reformation, writers have attracted pilgrims because they



Left: Adam Lindsay Gordon, c. 1850–c. 1870. Photographer unknown. JK Moir Collection, LTAF 1250/152



Right: Last home of Adam Lindsay Gordon, 10 Lewis Street, Brighton, Victoria. Photograph before c. 1942. Photographer unknown. Pictures Collection, H12104

have proved to be the ideal heroes for secular culture and the most satisfying objects of national pride.³ The practice of literary pilgrimage is almost always belated, occurring after the death of the author, representing a desire to keep their memory alive. Inherited from the United Kingdom, literary pilgrimage in Australia has taken on local inflections, as evidenced by the practices associated with Gordon.

In England it was common for graveside visits to be commemorated by poetic reflections. William Howitt's famous collection *Homes and Haunts of the Most Eminent British Poets* catalogues the final resting places of writers and notable personages who visited them and wrote about their experiences.⁴

Book collector and Gordon bibliographer Ian McLaren claimed that the gatherings at Gordon's grave produced great outpourings of feeling and were without literary precedent in Australia.⁵ Melissa Bellanta notes that members of the cult of Gordon were overwhelmingly male, as demonstrated by footage of a pilgrimage to his grave which was screened in Australian cinemas in the mid-1920s.⁶ Gordon's grave inspired many poetic tributes, indicating its sacred nature and ongoing resonance for fellow poets. Half in love with the idea of death, Gordon pre-emptively imagined his own tributes in his famous poem 'The sick stockrider':

Let me slumber in the hollow where the wattle blossoms wave
With never stone or rail to fence my bed;
Should the sturdy station children pull the bush-flowers on my grave,
I may chance to hear them romping overhead.

Gordon's popularity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries is perhaps best illustrated by the pilgrimage of thousands to his grave on the anniversaries of his death in the 1920s and 1930s. At a time when Australian literature was considered inferior to imported literature from the Old World, Gordon's dual identity allowed for the possibility of a nascent Australian literature without the rejection of English literary tradition.

Although Gordon's poetry may be unfashionable now, there have always been fans who kept his memory alive. There are a number of tangible memorials to Gordon in Victoria and South Australia, yet his grave remains a focal point of remembrance today. The grave itself is the product of – and the focus for – a constellation of practices which have evolved over time. A site hallowed by the author's remains, Gordon's grave serves to link his canonical poetry to a specific place.

The mass pilgrimages to Gordon's grave, beginning in 1892, were both celebratory and generative, prompting the establishment of other commemorations, including two house museums – Dingley Dell Cottage, in South Australia, and the Adam Lindsay Gordon Craft cottage, in Ballarat, Victoria; a bust in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey, London; a statue in Spring Street, Melbourne; and a suburb named Gordon in Canberra.

Gordon commemorations were largely driven by the multiple organisations devoted to his memory, including the Adam Lindsay Gordon Pilgrimage Committee and the Gordon Memorial Fund, which merged in 1919 to become the Gordon Memorial Committee; the Gordon Lovers' Society, which had branches in Sydney and Melbourne; and more recently the Adam Lindsay Gordon Commemorative Committee. Special Gordon evenings were run by various clubs, such as the Buonarotti Club, the Australian Literature Society and the Young Men's Literary and Scientific Association. Members of the Australian Natives' Association, a male-only club formed in the 1870s, numbered among some of Gordon's most ardent followers who sought to support his memorialisation. Bellanta writes that the association 'appreciated the flattering vision of early colonial life that Gordon offered in his work' and 'hosted earnest lectures on his legacy'.⁷

The prevalence of such events indicates that Gordon was a pivotal figure in Australian literary culture, since his cult following and the events organised by his fans led directly to the establishment of the Australian Literature Society, which aimed to promote the recognition and support of local authors. In 1898, William R Furlong, a noted singer, composer and teacher of music, and his wife issued invitations to their numerous literary friends for an evening devoted to Gordon. The evening was so successful that the first meeting

of the Australian Literature Society was held at Furlong's Music Studio on 26 July 1899. Therefore, the passion for Gordon might be said to have generated greater interest in Australian authors more broadly.

Beach suicide

Gordon's dramatic suicide, at the age of 37, was almost certainly the catalyst for his canonisation and the construction of a number of 'shrines', including his grave at the Brighton General Cemetery. The public interest in accounts of his final hours indicates that devotees sought to cultivate intimacy with him even – or especially – in death. Gordon's fateful walk from his house at 10 Lewis Street to Picnic Point has been recounted many times, cementing his connection to Brighton. Accounts were published in his obituary and after the inquest, which was held on 25 June 1870, the same day as his burial.⁸

On the morning of his death Gordon kissed his sleeping wife, Maggie, and set off with his rifle towards the Marine Hotel, on New Street, which would have taken him around 20 minutes to reach. At around 7.30 am, upon reaching the hotel, he asked for the proprietor, Mr Prendergast, and was told by his son that he was not yet up. On being asked if he should be woken, Gordon said it was 'of no great consequence'.⁹ He took a shot of brandy and walked off in the direction of the beach. Soon after, a fisherman named William Harrison nodded to him, but Gordon took no notice. Harrison testified at the inquest that Gordon had borne 'a curious look, as though he was vexed'.¹⁰ Gordon shot himself on the beach at the end of Park Street, near Picnic Point, where he was later found by William Petterfor Allen, a storekeeper, who was chasing his cow through the tea-tree scrub nearby. Gordon's body was taken back to the Marine Hotel, where it remained prior to the burial.

As the site where Gordon's body lay, the Marine Hotel has played a special part in Gordon commemorations. There was a proposal to preserve the outbuilding of the hotel, but this proved unsuccessful.¹¹ More than six decades after Gordon's death, the stretcher used to carry his body from the beach to the Marine Hotel was presented to JK Moir, the 'knight grand cheese' of the Bread and Cheese Club art and literary society, for preservation.¹² The fact that it had been carefully kept and then passed on demonstrates the urge to collect Gordon relics and to circulate them among like-minded admirers.

Gordon's suicide seems especially tragic to his followers since he seemed at the time to be on the cusp of greater success, with the publication of *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes* taking place on the day before his suicide. This collection is considered to represent his most valuable contribution to Australian literature.¹³ As with other suicides, the cause is ultimately

unknowable, yet devotees have collectively dedicated their energies to exploring possible reasons for his actions. A mistake-ridden obituary in the *Argus* states that Gordon was ‘a fatalist in the fullest sense of the word’ and that he ‘had frequently stated that on more than one occasion he had put a pistol to his temple with suicidal intentions, but was restrained by the thought of his wife, to whom he was devotedly attached’.¹⁴ A widespread understanding of Gordon as the originator of the Australian ‘fatalist school of poetry’ is intimately bound up with the story of his suicide. Reporting on the 1913 grave pilgrimage, the *Brighton Southern Cross* noted that Gordon ‘founded Australia’s school of grim fatalism and he voiced Australia’s code of honour’.¹⁵ This account reiterates his personal integrity and suggests a melancholy strand in his psychological make-up.

Factors that contributed to Gordon’s suicide included his failure to secure a claim to the barony of Esslemont, in Scotland; the weight of his debts; the poor reception of his verse; the death of his daughter, Annie, and the subsequent break with his first wife; and his ongoing battle with depression, exacerbated by horse-riding accidents. One of the findings of the inquest was that his riding injuries had contributed to his ill health:

He had sustained several falls in steeplechase riding and hunting. His skull had been fractured on one occasion, and his brain was much affected by these falls. He had himself said that he was mad. The brain of [the] deceased, was injured to that extent ... that he might be subject to delusions, and to attacks of melancholy at all times.¹⁶

Because of Gordon’s straitened circumstances, funds were raised by his close friends for a proper gravestone, and in October 1870, the stone was erected by admirers including Marcus Clarke and Gordon’s publisher AH Massina.¹⁷ As the *Australasian* reported:

The monument raised in memory of the late Adam Lindsay Gordon is now finished. It is erected over his remains in the picturesque cemetery of Brighton, and is placed in a conspicuous position by the main avenue, on a gently sloping rise, fanned by the sea-breeze, and looking towards the setting sun. The monument, although unpretentious is a handsome one, consisting of a massive bluestone base, diamond-hammered on all faces with boldly tooled margin drafts, and chamfer. Upon this base rests a finely-rubbed bluestone pedestal, with handsomely moulded plinth. Upon each face of the pedestal, a polished white marble tablet is affixed.¹⁸

People who knew Gordon personally also felt a special responsibility



Left: Adam Lindsay Gordon's memorial at his grave, Brighton cemetery, c. 1892–1900. Photograph by Charles Rudd. Pictures Collection, H39357/245



Right: Statue of Adam Lindsay Gordon by Paul Montford, near Parliament House in Spring Street, Melbourne (detail). Photograph by Rennie Ellis, c. 1990s. Pictures Collection, H2011.150/2713

to contribute to the establishment and maintenance of his grave. Elizabeth Lauder, a friend from South Australia, initially funded the upkeep of the grave and regularly contributed floral tributes, as this letter of 23 June 1884 attests:

Sir Many thanks for your kind answer enclosed £1 for the Sexton and I would like above all others one Wattle Tree with the beautiful yellow blossoms and a few Snowflakes, I have sent by train some Violets from my own garden (not for the value of them but simply because I have grown them) ...

Hoping the Sexton will plant the grave nicely with a few Simple flowers Forget me not, etc.¹⁹

Graveyard pilgrimages

The close attention paid to the decoration of Gordon's grave was matched by the eagerness of followers to visit it, although collective pilgrimages did not officially begin until the early 1890s, two decades after his death. The first organised gathering at the grave, on 25 June 1892, involved the laying of a wreath containing flowers from the 'old country' rather than Australian flora. It was made by Jane Lees (née Bridges), a love interest of Gordon's from the early 1850s.²⁰ John Howlett-Ross, a public elocutionist, described Lees

as having been ‘the direct cause of Gordon leaving England as and when he did’.²¹ Shortly after the publication of his biographical work *Laureate of the Centaurs*, in 1888, Howlett-Ross had made Lees’s acquaintance and received ‘the story of Gordon’s early love’. At the time of their meeting, Lees had been a grandmother of 60 years of age. She wished Howlett-Ross to convey her ‘romantic token of affection’ for the dead poet.²² Lees’s wreath was made up of cotton grasses from the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire; wild geranium leaves from Wivelsfield, in Sussex; feathery sumach from Cradley, Herefordshire; buttercups from Worcester; bits of fern from other counties; and slips from Lees’s own garden.²³ By making the wreath, Lees sought to connect Gordon’s grave to the country of his youth. In this way, a brief liaison from Gordon’s private past became a vital element of a public commemoration ceremony. A reporter from the *Argus* sent to cover the event commented on the touching scene: ‘The days of romance cannot have passed away from this busy work-a-day world, else there would have been fewer faces at the strangely romantic episode enacted on Saturday afternoon around the monument in a quiet burial-ground at Brighton which marks the resting-place of Adam Lindsay Gordon’.²⁴

After the symbolic wreath-laying, members of the Gordon Lovers’ felt the wreath should be protected in a glass case, due to its significance, yet little is known about how it was subsequently stored. In 1926, it reappeared, displayed in a shop window in Elizabeth Street, in central Melbourne. It was not seen again until its remains were put into sachets placed inside copies of the limited edition *Adam Lindsay Gordon Memorial Volume*, published in 1926 by the Gordon Memorial Committee in association with the Lothian Publishing Company.²⁵ The Hobart *Mercury* notes that Gordon married a wife who was a loyal companion to him until his death, ‘yet the picture of him, which is displayed conspicuously in a window in Elizabeth-street is surrounded by a wreath of faded English wildflowers, gathered by this first early love’. The anonymous author notes that this mawkish sentimentality would ‘add another terror to death for celebrities’.²⁶ The lengths Gordon devotees went to in order to protect the wreath and sustain its preservation into the future suggest that it was regarded as a sacred relic, through both its association with Jane Lees and its placement on Gordon’s grave.

The wattle was Gordon’s ‘especial flower’, and it was duly disseminated across pilgrimage sites. As part of a mass pilgrimage in 1910, sprigs of wattle were laid on the grave inaugurating an annual celebration in Victoria that became known as Wattle Day. The Adam Lindsay Gordon Wattle Movement also initiated a plan to distribute seeds from the poet’s grave for planting

throughout the world. There is a long tradition, going back to the 18th century, of sharing seeds and cuttings of plants and trees from 'sacred' literary sites.²⁷ Alison Booth suggested, 'To snatch sprigs of a poet's hedge or to replant an offshoot of his fallen tree is to replace a tangible part for something once alive and whole, a metonymy'.²⁸ Not only is the wattle flower associated with Gordon; it has also long been aligned with literature in Australia. Indeed, an Australian Poets' Corner, or Nature's Cathedral, was established at Wattle Park in Melbourne in the late 1920s by the Wattle League for the purpose of commemorating departed poets, including Gordon, and wattle trees were planted there in their honour.

Traditionally, floral tributes have predominated in Gordon rituals, yet there is at least one piece of cinematic documentation that attests to his immense popularity. Surviving fragments of the 1916 film *The life's romance of Adam Lindsay Gordon*, directed by WJ Lincoln and GH Barnes, provide evidence of a pilgrimage to the grave. While only reels 1, 3 and 5 of the five-reel film still exist, in the National Sound and Film Archive of Australia, their footage also shows several incidents in Gordon's life, with intertitles taken from his poems. Gordon is played by the actor and writer Hugh McCrae, who bore a strong physical resemblance to Gordon.²⁹ The film ends with a shot from the 1916 pilgrimage, which occurred on Sunday 3 September.³⁰ A review in the *Adelaide Register* praised the directors for the film's 'realistic representation of the romantic life' of Australia's most popular poet.

Gordon's versatility was one of the most charming features of his life, the various phases of which were realistically portrayed on the screen. Careful attention was paid to the selection of appropriate scenery, and this, combined with capable and sympathetic acting, made the picture a strong attraction. There are many who have derived considerable pleasure from reading his charming lines, and to see the various incidents which inspired them faithfully acted by capable artists was an additional enjoyment. Apart from its historical interest, the film has a decidedly romantic attraction.³¹

At the 1917 pilgrimage, 4000 people passed around the grave, which was covered with wreaths sent by various societies and with bunches of wattle, the offerings of admirers. The *Port Macquarie News and Hastings River Advocate* observed, 'Although it is 47 years since Gordon died several who knew him well were present'.³² In the February of the following year, Gordon's grave was badly damaged by a storm – the column was blown down and the laurel wreath (made of stone) violently thrown aside – requiring substantial repair before the 1918 pilgrimage.³³

The 1919 pilgrimage was enhanced by the presence of Gordon's former wife, Maggie Park Low, with William Low, one of her four children. The remains of the baby Annie – Maggie and Gordon's daughter – were brought from Ballarat by the Australian Natives' Association to rest with her father in Brighton. This was Park Low's final appearance at a Gordon pilgrimage, as she died later in the year.

At the height of Gordon's popularity, in the 1920s, numbers of pilgrims surged to around 5000. In 1924, organisers used two lorries as platforms at a new pilgrimage location, at the corner of North and Hawthorn roads, on the edge of the Brighton cemetery. This had been proposed in order to prevent damage to graves, which had occurred due to overcrowding at earlier pilgrimages. The upsurge in Gordon's appeal can be partly attributed to the release of paperback versions of his poetry, which were taken away to World War I by soldiers. This was made possible by the lapse in copyright in 1911, when the rights to Gordon's work became more widely available.

After his death, Maggie gave the copyright to his publisher AH Massina and Company in return for a small fee over three years, a deal which she came to regret. In an interview with the Adelaide *Advertiser* on 23 March 1912, she explained:

I had the copyright of all the books, but I sold them about thirty [sic] years ago for a very small sum, much less than they were worth, and since then I have had no advantage from the sale of the books. I have often regretted parting with the rights.³⁴

For over 40 years, AH Massina published Gordon's *Poems*. Writing to AG Stephens, editor of the *Bulletin*, Massina claimed that *Poems* 'had the largest number of copies sold of any book of that description, totalling over 40,000 copies of all parts'.³⁵ Due to the monetary value of the copyright, Massina refused permission for Douglas Sladen to publish the best of Gordon's poems, which meant that Sladen could only include minor ones in *Australian Ballads and Rhymes* (1888).³⁶

Ian McLaren's bibliography indicated that sales of Gordon's works, in variant editions, were very successful.³⁷ The first decade of the 20th century saw burgeoning sales of *Poems* in Australia, England and the United States, along with a massive growth in sales of postcards depicting Gordon and his works. Gordon's writing also rated highly in a string of polls conducted in 1910 by the Sydney *Bulletin*.³⁸ In 1912, the year that the copyright on *Poems* ended, the market was flooded with seven Massina editions. With Edith Humphris, Sladen produced *Adam Lindsay Gordon and His Friends in England and Australia*³⁹ which related the story of Gordon's youth in minute detail,



Attendees at the annual pilgrimage to Adam Lindsay Gordon's memorial, Brighton cemetery, 1913. Photographer unknown. Pictures Collection, H98.88/15

and over 10,000 copies were sold in the first year of publication. The volume contributed substantially to interest in the details of Gordon's life in England, before his migration to Australia, including his acquaintance with Jane Lees.

In September 1909, Thomas C Lothian, who was also Henry Lawson's Melbourne publisher, took advantage of the expiry of the copyright to print a cheap edition of *Sea Spray and Smoke Drift*. When the copyright of *Galloping Rhymes* expired, on 25 June 1912, Frank Maldon Robb published an edition in London almost immediately.⁴⁰ The production of cheap pocket editions greatly increased the availability of Gordon's works, leading to a wider readership.

The lost Lewis Street house

Not all Brightonians approved of the Gordon pilgrimages, despite their mass appeal, and some even regarded Gordon as having been 'mad'. After Gordon's final residence in Lewis Street was demolished, local poet Cyril Goode faithfully stored and catalogued the bricks of the house and campaigned in vain for its resurrection. Goode found there was little support for his plan because Gordon's impecunious situation at the time of his death was seen by some affluent Brightonians as a blight on his integrity.

Goode's obsession with Gordon began as a boy when he first took part in a pilgrimage to the grave. Later, he was reprimanded at the local church for having attended. As Goode observed, "They saw him as a "drinking man" and a "racehorse man" instead of a poetic genius equal to Byron".⁴¹ Goode spent

his later years in Brighton trying to redress this misapprehension about his beloved poet. He remembered a Brighton mayor in the 1940s poking him in the chest, saying, ‘Do you realise that this man was behind on the rent?’⁴² In a diary entry of 30 March 1946, he wrote about meeting with the Brighton mayor to try to persuade the mayor to support his scheme to reconstruct the house in the botanical gardens.

The mayor tried to show how much he knew about Aus literature and how little we owe to Gordon. I more than held my own – even surprised myself, as I thought I might be nervous. When he disparaged Gordon (though only slightly) it roused me ... ‘He Didn’t Pay His Rent!’ They are like parrots with this catch cry. I replied ‘Do you think that an author must be successful enough to hold the title to a house before it is worth preserving? What about Robbie Burns? You know he had the bailiff in – yet the Scotch people never pulled *his* place down.’

Here Goode refutes the view of Gordon as a debtor and rent defaulter held by many bourgeois Brighton citizens.

Ironically, at the peak of Gordon’s popularity – as evidenced by the large attendances at his grave – Captain James Cook’s cottage, originally located in Yorkshire, was bought by philanthropist Russell Grimwade, deconstructed brick by brick, packed into cases and shipped to Melbourne to be placed in the Fitzroy Gardens in East Melbourne. Grimwade donated Cook’s cottage to the people of Victoria for the centenary anniversary of the settlement of Melbourne, in October 1934.⁴³ If there had been more widespread support for preserving Gordon’s Brighton house, it might have been relocated to Fitzroy Gardens to mark the centenary of Gordon’s death instead.

Around the same time, there *was* a successful attempt to move a cottage associated with Gordon: from the livery stables of Craig’s Royal Hotel, Ballarat, to the local botanical gardens. The building was officially opened by the governor of Victoria in August 1934. Local historian Helen Dehn has contended that the cottage moved to the gardens was used only as a ‘doss’ or for storage, or perhaps for both. Dehn argues that ‘it has been widely assumed that Gordon lived in this cottage, but available evidence indicates that Gordon and his wife and daughter lived in a six roomed weatherboard house on the shores of Lake Wendouree’.⁴⁴ Whether or not Gordon actually spent much time there, the cottage was preserved. It was restored in the early 1990s, reopening in 1992 as an outlet for locally produced crafts. The profits from the shop go into the running of the cottage, thereby solving a problem that besets many literary house properties.

The ghostly apparition of the lost Lewis Street house, long demolished and replaced by a newer dwelling, persistently haunts discussions of Gordon's life. After Cyril Goode's death, all of the bricks from the Lewis Street house were taken to Ron Rado's amusement park Gumbaya World, where they remain to this day. The management has announced its intention to use them at the park and incorporate a plaque to Gordon, but this has not yet happened.⁴⁵

In *A Skeptic's Guide to Writers' Houses*, Anne Trubek observes that sometimes acts of non-preservation are intentional, political or appropriate. In this case, both financial support and political will were lacking. 'Nonhouses', or failed house projects, can induce a sense of longing, which the best writers' houses can also induce in the visitor. For Trubek, 'nonhouses' display the interconnections between physical and imaginary, past and present, fact and fiction.⁴⁶ The Lewis Street 'nonhouse', to use Trubek's term, represents a lost opportunity that is still mourned by his admirers.

Rituals in transition

The volume of visitors to Gordon's grave spiked exponentially in the 1920s and mid-1930s. In 1932, the year before the centenary of his birth, a bronze statue of him was erected in Spring Street, Melbourne, near the Victorian parliament buildings. The statue depicts Gordon as a horseman-poet, sitting with a pen and book in hand and a saddle beneath his chair. Two quotations from his works and from the verse of his friend Henry Kendall are carved into the freestone pedestal. Created by the sculptor Paul Montford, the monument was the result of two decades of fundraising. In 1911, a public meeting was held to consider erecting a memorial to Gordon. The first subscription predated this meeting, with the Earl of Dudley donating £60 in 1910. A second meeting, held in 1912, was not well attended, and the fund was still £1000 short. It was another 20 years before the memorial was finally erected, partly thanks to the fundraising efforts of the Australian Natives' Association. In the presence of over 2000 people, Premier Argyle unveiled the statue on 30 October 1932.⁴⁷ An equestrian Gordon statue had been considered for St Kilda Road but it was left to supporters to erect one in Sturt Street, Ballarat, in 1969. Mounted on Warrenheip granite, it is in the form of a horse cast in bronze to memorialise Gordon, along with the horses and mules killed in World War I.⁴⁸ Funds for this equestrian bronze were provided by visitors to the Ballarat Memorial Cottage (now known as the Adam Lindsay Gordon Craft Cottage).

The centenary of Gordon's birth, in 1933, saw further expressions of interest, with the publication of Edith Humphris's biography *The Life of Adam Lindsay Gordon*, celebrations in Cheltenham, England, and a plaque placed at his

childhood home. After the erection of the Spring Street statue and the unveiling of the bust at Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey, Gordon celebrations began to lose momentum in the late 1930s and 1940s. The last official mass pilgrimage occurred in June 1947. The establishment of Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance, in 1934, and the outbreak of World War II, in 1945, played a part in the diminishing popularity of the pilgrimages.⁴⁹ The deaths of people who knew Gordon personally also had a discernible effect on the size of the events. Ardent supporters and organisers also began to disappear, including Charles R Long, founder of the Australian Literature Society and core member of the Gordon Memorial Committee, who died in December 1944; and Douglas Sladen, who passed away in February 1947. John Howlett-Ross, who initiated the first mass pilgrimage and energetically promoted Gordon through writing and performance, died in April 1953, at the age of 96.⁵⁰

Once the original cemetery pilgrimages ceased, other rituals emerged to take their place, yet none had the same level of popularity and longevity. In 1950, a wreath-laying ceremony was inaugurated at the Gordon statue in Spring Street. According to a report in *The Age*, this gathering was also framed as a 'pilgrimage', sponsored by the Bread and Cheese Club and the Australian Literature Society. Ex-president of the Bread and Cheese Club and literary patron JK Moir observed at the ceremony that 'poets and soldiers are the only ones honoured with statues and pilgrimages'.⁵¹ Here, Moir reflects on the limited nature of commemoration practices in a relatively 'young' nation. In the same year, pilgrimages to the Ballarat house were 'revived' by the new president and officers of the Gordon Memorial Cottage. According to a report in *Bohemia* magazine, produced by the Bread and Cheese Club, supporters planned to run these pilgrimages on a larger scale; however, evidence suggests that the proposed enlargement of the practice failed to eventuate.⁵²

After 1950, there were sporadic attempts to keep the Gordon spirit alive, yet celebrations never reached the heights of those in the 1920s and 1930s. An article in the *Sun* in June 1969 entitled 'Fewer still will care' reported on the very small turnout to a commemorative ceremony on Brighton Beach, where Gordon died.⁵³ The accompanying photograph shows 13 people assembled, including the bush poet Mike Brady reading Gordon's verses, while another man records the proceedings with a microphone. The article notes that there was nobody at Gordon's grave or at the Marine Hotel, while people 'scurried past' the statue in the city, implying that he had been largely forgotten.⁵⁴

In 1970, the year of the centenary of Gordon's death, it was decided to revive the Gordon pilgrimages but with a 'new look'. The celebration was held at the Marine Hotel – often called Gordon's Pub – on 24 June, around the anniversary

of his death. A new tradition was begun, with a wreath of golden wattle being laid on the original hitching post outside the pub, which was used by Gordon in the last months of his life. A plaque was also fixed onto the hitching post detailing Gordon's connection with the hotel. The inscription reads:

Adam Lindsay Gordon Poet and Horseman tethered his horse to this hitching post during his residence in Brighton 1869–70. A shining soul with syllables of fire who sang the first great songs these lands can claim (Kendall). Preserved and dedicated to his memory by the United Licensed Victuallers Association 20th October 1945.⁵⁵

The new tradition was one of many gestures made towards Gordon's memory around the Brighton area in the late 20th century. On 24 June 1990, Gordon followers gathered at the commemorative 'Gordon stones' in the Brighton Town Hall Gardens. Decorated with a relief portrait of Gordon and the crests of the Gordon family and the City of Brighton, these 'stones' could more realistically be described as rocks. The event, organised by the Brighton Historical Society, featured speeches and readings dedicated to the suburb's 'pioneer' poet, but it was never repeated.

It was not until the 2000s that Gordon celebrations were taken up again in a consistent manner. With the establishment of the Adam Lindsay Gordon Commemorative Committee, in 2006, attention turned to the restoration of Gordon's grave, which badly needed repair, including the resealing of plaques on the monument. Annual cemetery tours are now conducted by the Adam Lindsay Gordon Commemorative Committee and the Brighton Cemeterians, a group which has close ties to the Brighton Historical Society.

The close alignment between Gordon and wattle continues to this day, with wattle being laid on the Spring Street statue of Gordon every year in mid-June, around the anniversary of his death. The wattle is procured from gardens around Brighton and given out to participants during the ceremony. The practice of wattle-laying is accompanied by bubble-blowing, a gesture which refers to Gordon's famous poem 'Ye wearie wayfarer':

Question not, but live and labour
 Till yon goal be won,
 Helping every feeble neighbour,
 Seeking help from none;
 Life is mostly froth and bubble,
 Two things stand like stone,
 Kindness in another's trouble,
 Courage in your own.⁵⁶

Conclusion

Edward Casey observes in his book *Getting Back into Place* that ‘persons who live in places – who inhabit or re-inhabit them – come to share features with the local landscape; but equally so, they make a difference to, perhaps indelibly mark, the land in which they dwell’.⁵⁷ Gordon’s brief habitation and death in Brighton, as well as the practices associated with his grave, have indelibly marked the suburb, even if many contemporary residents have never heard of him, let alone read his poetry.

As this article has shown, visitors to Brighton General Cemetery have persistently communed with Gordon’s ghost during the 148 years since his burial. Gordon’s grave has provided a focal point for all kinds of remembrance, both collective and solitary. A photograph of Brighton Grammar School students at Gordon’s grave taken in 1970 suggests that they were taken to the cemetery to be introduced to the local celebrity who had died 100 years earlier.⁵⁸ Journalist and memoirist Ross Fitzgerald has written about how he would lie next to Gordon’s grave as a drunken adolescent and soak up his poetic genius:

My idea of a good Saturday night was to go to Melbourne’s Brighton Cemetery with a flagon and sit drinking in front of Adam Lindsay Gordon’s obelisk. It read: ‘Life is only froth and bubble, Two things stand like stone, Kindness in another’s trouble, Courage in your own.’

I now think it significant that, instead of being attracted to the grave of gangster Squizzy Taylor or bent Victorian politician Thomas Bent, I found myself in front of Gordon, the alcoholic poet, who killed himself on the beach near Park Street, Brighton, where I often used to drink myself.⁵⁹

Fitzgerald mistakenly understood Gordon to be an alcoholic, when many sources report that he was merely a moderate drinker who couldn’t tolerate spirits at all after he fractured his skull in a riding accident. Nevertheless, Fitzgerald’s communion with Gordon’s spirit expresses the psychic significance of his grave for the suburb of Brighton and the city of Melbourne more widely. Gordon was a ‘wayfarer’ who frequently changed occupations and residences, leaving multiple traces behind him, yet it is his final resting place, in Brighton, which has the greatest pre-eminence.