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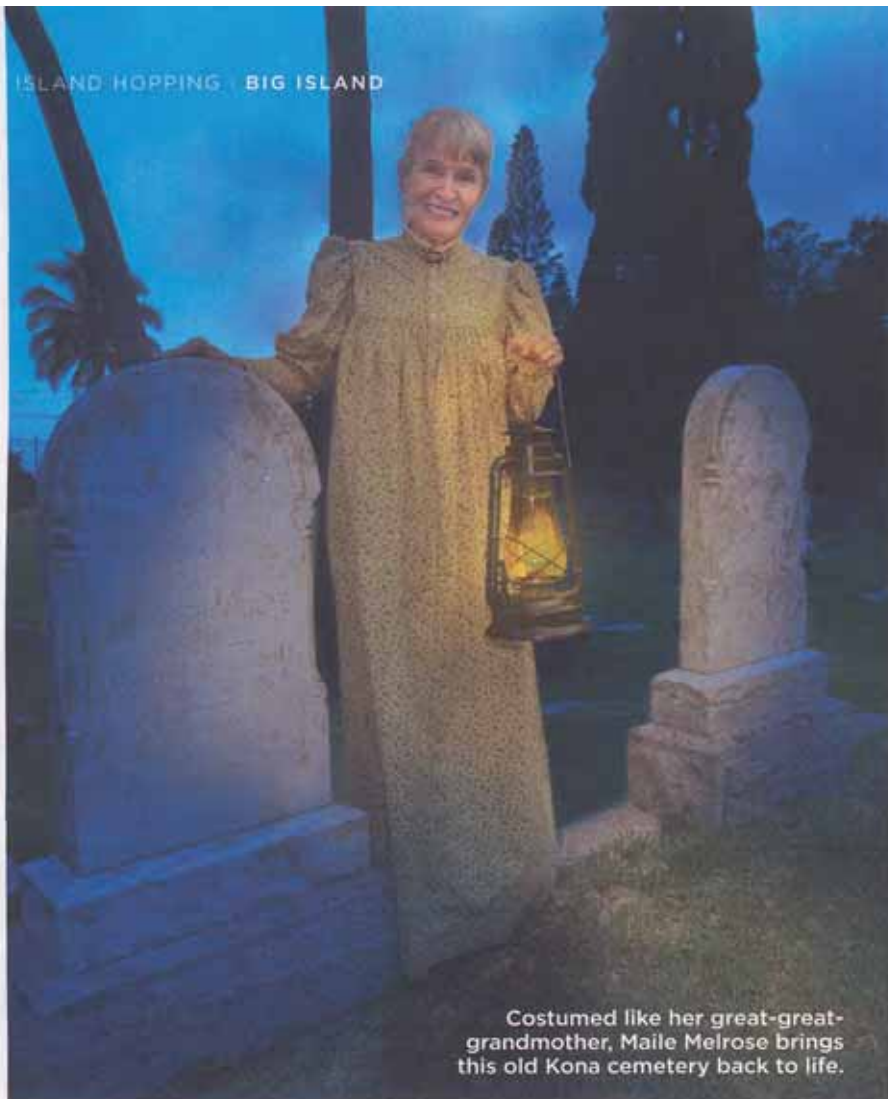
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Costumed like her great-great-grandmother, Maile Melrose brings this old Kona cemetery back to life.

Lively Graveyard

ACTOR AND HISTORIAN MAILE MELROSE MAKES THE DEAD PAST LIVE AGAIN.

BY JOHN HECKATHORN • PHOTO BY DAVID CROXFORD

It sounds spooky, touring an old Kona graveyard by lantern light. Especially since your guide is buried there.

Well, not exactly.

Our guide is Maile Melrose, who's not only alive, but quite lively. Wearing a 19th-century dress and carrying an oil lantern, she's playing the part of her great-great-grandmother, Elizabeth Caroline Greenwell (1841–1934).

Melrose's double-great grandma, "Lizzy" Greenwell, does indeed lie buried here. Next to Lizzy is her husband, Henry Nicholas Greenwell (1826–1891), the man who, among other accomplishments, made Kona coffee a worldwide brand. The two had a ranch and store less than a mile away. They worshipped, saw their children married and were buried at Christ Church in Kealakekua, just down the coast from Kailua-Kona.

That was long ago. However, Melrose is both a historian and an actor. If anyone can breathe life into these surroundings, she can.

"This church was founded in 1867," she says. It's the oldest Episcopal church in the Islands. "For some reason the bishop, who could be a nasty old fuddyduddy, didn't approve. He got rid of the first rector," adds Melrose. "It's amazing who found their way to Kona and ended up buried in this tiny graveyard."

There are plenty of Greenwells, of course, several generations of a family that remains prominent on the Big Island to this day. "This is my grave," says Melrose, respectfully patting her great-great-grandmother's.

In addition, though, there are people you would never expect.

Under the largest and most imposing monument in the cemetery lies Charles Lambert (1850–1874). Lambert was the scion of one of the richest families in England, his grandfather having made a fortune in copper. The grandson fell ill, and, looking for a warmer climate, hitched a ride on the HMS *Scout*, which put into Kailua-Kona harbor.

There, while a guest at Hulihe'e Palace, Lambert tried his hand at surfing—disastrously. "The Hawaiians massaged him and even turned him upside down, but they couldn't revive him," says Melrose. "His family made a journey around the world, in a private steam yacht called the *Wanderer*, and brought this stone for him."

The 1882 journey (which included, in addition to the Lamberts, four children, a clergyman, a governess, a marine artist and a crew of 51) was chronicled in both a 19th-century and a 20th-century book. The Lamberts were important enough that they stopped in Honolulu to call on Hawaiian royalty, and made sure to take in the Big Island's Volcano House before they sailed back to England via China and Japan.

Others in the graveyard were not as wealthy. In 1852, Ting Sing was one of the first Chinese "coolie laborers" brought into this primarily Hawaiian community. Unable to buy land, he worked as a cook. He eventually married a Hawaiian woman, Kahula Ka'apana Ting Sing, and together they had 10 children, many of whom lie buried with their mother.

CHRIST CHURCH EPISCOPAL

81-1004 Konawaena School Road, Kealakekua

Sadly, many infants and mothers lie buried here. "Childbirth was hell in the 19th century," says Melrose.

The graveyard is nothing if not cosmopolitan. Albert Sala was the son of Italian immigrants to England. His brother, George Augustus Sala, was a friend of Charles Dickens and one of the most noted journalists of his day. Albert ended up teaching school on the Kona Coast and courting one of the Greenwell daughters, though his untimely death in 1896 prevented the marriage. "That was probably to the relief of the Greenwells, who, being of their time, had narrow ideas about who was a suitable husband," adds Melrose.

"There's even scandal here," says Melrose. The first person buried (well, pieces of him) in the graveyard was William Glenney, who, in 1867, was blown off course with a friend in a small sailboat. The Kona sheriff tried to prosecute the friend for murder and cannibalism, but without success.

"And this is odd," she says. "These two graves here are set apart far from the rest, all by themselves in this corner." One belongs to a Hawaiian girl, Elizabeth Waha. The other, right by her side, belongs to the second rector of the parish, Reverend Davis. No one knows where Mrs. Davis is buried.

"Mrs. Davis had a nasty tongue and was always causing trouble," says Melrose. "Henry Greenwell himself had to go talk to Reverend Davis about her, which he must have hated, since he was English and marriage counseling was way out of his normal line of work."

As Melrose talks, the people who lived and died here 150 years ago—back when Kona was an isolated and barely settled part of the planet—all those people seem vivid, as though she is gossiping about neighbors.

A graveyard has never seemed so alive. †

Maile Melrose's guided tour of the Christ Church Cemetery is given only by demand except during Halloween month, October, when it takes place every Friday at sunset. For more information, contact the Kona Historical Society, (808) 323-3222.

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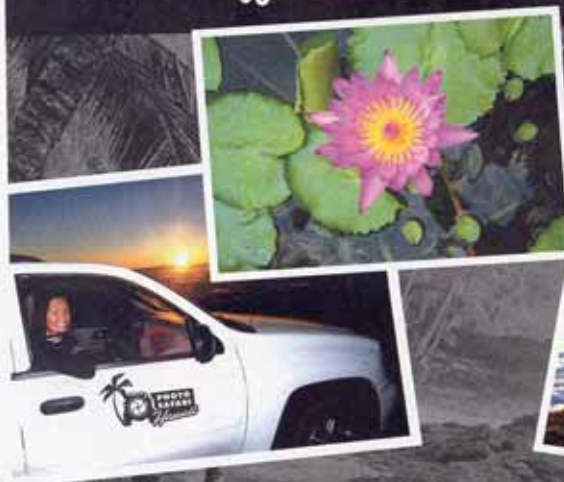
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